throw me a goddamn rope - just enough to hang myself with

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Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
F/F, Gen, M/M

Fandom:
僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

Relationship:
Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead/Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Kayama Nemuri | Midnight/Midoriya Inko, Midoriya Inko & Midoriya Izuku, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Midoriya Izuku, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Yagi Toshinori | All Might

Character:
Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Inko, Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Kayama Nemuri | Midnight, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Sensei | All For One, Bakugou Katsuki, Todoroki Shouto, Todoroki Enji | Endeavor, Todoroki Rei, Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Shigaraki Tomura | Shimura Tenko, Tsukauchi Naomasa, Tamakawa Sansa, Dabi (My Hero Academia)

Additional Tags:
Time Travel, Time Travel Fix-It, Family Fluff, Families of Choice, Mystery, (kind of it's more like 'no one told aizawa anything and he's trying to put it together'), Protective Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Parental Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Protective Midoriya Inko, inko is a great mom to all of her children -, izuku shouta and all of shoutas kids, Sensei | All For One is Midoriya Hisashi, he's not the worst dad but he's def not in the top ten, somehow aizawa makes izuku even more effective in beating ppl w/ friendship, he doesn't know how so don't ask, BAMF Midoriya Izuku, BAMF Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Self-Esteem Issues, Bullying, Mental Health Issues, every character's got something going on them's the brakes kiddos, Implied/Referenced Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism, Domestic Fluff, there's a lotta fluffiness but it's

mostly from aizawa's pov so it comes across grumpy, the power of friendship and kindness, Suicidal Thoughts, not for long though and it's not from POV's perspective, this is generally fluffy and fun!!! warm fic for the soul, Hurt/Comfort, Internalized Misogyny, Implied/Referenced Domestic Violence, Implied/Referenced Sexual Assault, (minor on those last two tags! only discussed!), BAMF Midoriya Inko, Unreliable Narrator, (to a certain extent this isn't a 'doubt reality' type of fic)

Language:
English

Collections:
Storycatchers' pile of heroic hero stuff, Terrific Time Travel Fics, Jeru's Top Fav My Hero Academia fics, Dad Vibes, Time Travel Fun, BNHA Rereadables 📖, □Izuku and his Collection of Dads□, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, Don't Mess with Dadzawa, Time Travel Fics, the peasant's guide to fine reading, Bnha Bookclub Discord Recs, Best Fics From Across The Multiverse, You haven't lived if you haven't read this, Read it and weep, 僕のヒーローアカデミア - (読み返す [よみかえす]), Best of BNHA, Got 99 problems but these ain't one, If I ever had a will to write it would be because of these fics, An Assortment of Damn Good Fics, Stories That Are Cool, 3am Fics Stealing My Sleep, ☆ Little Red's BNHA Library ☆, The Best of Aizawa, Rhynes MHA favs, A Picky Reader's Top Picks, Top 10%, Bnha titles that were definitely worth my sleepless nights, Quality Fics, Time travel fics that are good and worth the read, Yumi treasure box, Dadzawa protects the green bunny, Boku no hero academia, Get Recc'd, Aizawa Being a Dad, bernie's bnha rec list, Best of Dodo's Hero Academia, fantastic_fics, will reread, comfort fics, The Mighty Dadzawa, Quality Fics, The gold standard of My Hero Academia fics., My heart is full, Lady's collection of PERFECT fics., ive been here since i was twelve and these r the fucking best, Yubi Heroic Bookshelf, the perfect fic doesn't exi-, These are Bundles of Emotions (and I Love them af), to be read boku no hero fics, T's Recommended Fics, Purple Archivist: Read and Read Again, Unseen Childhoods, ☆□My Hero Stories Worth Your Time☆□, 💔My Hero Stories That Made Me Cry💔, My Hero Academia, soul healing comes from fanfiction, Don't Forget These Fics, Road to Nowhere Discord Recs, In-Progress I Want To Read, The Gift of Caeculus, S.T.I.L.L., Void's BNHA Favorites :D, A Picky Vest's Favorites, SakurAlpha's Fic Rec of Pure how did you create this you amazing bean, Shady BNHA Faves (Including Crossovers), Magnolia's Favourite Fics, □My Favorite Works□, Time Travel AUs, ✧Insomnia Reads✧, FreakingAmazingFics, Favorites BNHA☆, long

fic to binge-read, Long Fics to Binge, Mha Fanfics to read when done, Banco Fic, Many Condensed to One, BNHA_SLICK_Fics, T.S.S (This shit slaps), mort's bnha favorites!!, Bec's Izuku Fics 🧢, Great Fics i Want To Re Read, Fics that made me stim, Fics recommended by lunakaiii on tik tok, The Heliocentric Discord Server Recs, Fix it., Dadzawa for the Soul, mha fanfic that waters my crops, Please sir these are my emotional support fics, my Hyperfixation is ~Very Pleased~ (✿◠‿◠), Whole Ass Novels, Time Travel Fics That Water My Crops, Writeass's favorite fics, Dadzawa protects the Green Bean!💚, MHA_fanfics_because_idk, From the Vault, Cloud & Shinra Best Fic, Present Mic is the best and I'm gonna YELL about it, Rains Favorites, Fics for D-Nasty, Tiktok_recommended, These fics made me scream, Reverse The Hourglass, grey_cosplay's tiktok MHA fic recs, Characters Explores Fix-it | Time Travel | Alternate Universe, mha fics that are my will to live, BEST BOI IZUKU_top BNHA works, RaeLynn's Epic Rec List, Fics That I Gotta Re-read Because I'm an Idiot and Forgot to Subscribe and Missed A Lot Of Updates, ♥ All-Time Favorites ♥, vespertine, 10/10 would re-read bnha, STO My Hero Academia - not completed works, my bnha beloveds 🌷, Fanfics I'd eat again at 3 am and already have, Timeless Time Travel Fics, fics better than a lot of published novels, Best Adoption Fics, thiccboimork's reading list, Stalker's Amongst Stalker's, Nicee, The Reading List, Hibernation_becauseyes, Chibi's hoard for sleepless nights, Best of Space/Time-travel fix-it's, Adore Able's Server MHA Time Travel Fix It Collection, FicsforKrusti, Just... ALL the MHA, Best of Fanfiction, CoffeeAt3, 📚 Fanfic Forum Discord Recs, JNW1'S favourite MHA/BNHA fics, The Fics You Read When You Want To Revisit Your Favorites, ibisfavs, For Ria ;), Eatbook's Cherished and wanting more All Fandoms, Amaris' Favorite Ever BNHA Fictions That She Has Read More Than You Can Count, Hand-picked by a picky-person, elian's favorites <3, my hero academia: a medley, dadzawa and his hellions, Why does Johnny have so many soaps?, I need to touch grass, god's in his heaven, Holy shit i love these (too good for just bookmarks), fanfics that make me froth in the mouth [but in a good way], HOLY SHIT ITS GOOD, just some incredible bnha ff, Pomarac's All Time Faves<3, Best incomplete mha fics, BNHAHappyFunFics, ùwú oh worm? then squirm., Nohn's Favorites, Fics to read, BEST MHA FICS TO EVER BE MADE 🧢, I'd like to thank the authors for their wonderful works (\ ._ .)\, Immaculate non-shippy fics that I adore, Baby Deku, Books but I'm Picky, Fics that somehow keep me alive, Time Travel Antics, hello yes i can't stop thinking about these works, ForRiamostly, Often on my mind - or keep it there, I wanna read these but am currently in a depressive episode, my little problem hero, AO3

Amazing, Mha fics that I hyperventilate over at 3am

Stats:

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throw me a goddamn rope - just enough to hang myself with

by mutalune

Summary

Shouta's plan had been ill-defined and desperate from the start, but he figures the important shit boiled down to, "Change as little as possible, make sure Midoriya doesn't get himself killed, and stock up on lychee jelly pouches because that flavor got discontinued three years from now." Keeping it simple's always better, and he's normally good at improvising.

Somewhere along the way, he must've fucked up since now he has:

A quirkless problem child hanging off of his every word

His best friend going through a sexuality crisis thanks to said problem child's mom

His other best friend clinging to him like a security blanket

Some two-bit mob boss threatening him with bouquets of daffodils

To wring the number one hero's fucking neck for not telling him anything useful before sending him decades into the past

All he did was walk Izuku Midoriya home. It wasn't meant to turn into whatever mess *this* is.

Notes

sending everyone a ton of love during the wild times we're living in - i've pretty much spent the last few months treading water and trying to keep afloat, so this is the first writing i've done in a decent bit (thanks to bnha for being a new fandom to dive into during quarantine and being GREAT at distracting me from thinking about how scary everything is right now!!! appreciate it babe)

hope you enjoy! i'm not sure where this is going or how far i'll go with it, but i hope everyone enjoys it in the mean time~

problem child is now tiny problem child

Shouta Aizawa has regrets. Not that he's an outlier in that - it's not exactly an uncommon occurrence in anyone who has made it past their teenage years.

He looks at his phone - a phone nearly three decades older than what he's used to - and he tries to reassure himself that he's at least over teenagerdom in this year. Last he checked, he was approaching sixty but he had long given up on keeping track. For all he knows, he had been closer to seventy than not.

Now, he thinks he's in his twenties. Maybe. He was born in… Around… Whenever. Whatever. He's pretty sure that the math says that he's twenty-three.

He doesn't know if he feels twenty-three.

If he's twenty-three, that means that he's more than allowed to semi-regret the fact that he only went far back enough for Deku to be ten. Not ideal, but it'll be more time to train him to satisfactory levels before he gets into U.A. Remembering how subpar he was the first time around - Shouta thinks that he can understand why Inko Midoriya was always so stressed out. That quirk of his must've been a nightmare at this age.

Is he even a teacher yet? His phone doesn't give many hints to what stage of life he's in. His call log is primarily unsaved numbers that he doesn't recognize. He has a number of missed calls from Hizashi and Nemuri, but not enough for him to pin down if past-him was in the middle of the depressive episode that eventually led him to apply for a job at U.A. and start getting his teaching degree.

Not that it matters. He knows what he has to do to stop Shigaraki's rise and reign of terror. It never would've gotten as bad as it did if Izuku "I somehow magically have seven-ish quirks" Midoriya hadn't been ill-prepared for battle, and it wouldn't have happened at all if Midoriya had met even half of his potential by the time he met All for One for the first time.

His problem child won't die this time. Shouta spent way too long trying to save the world before realizing that it was too late and had been too late for decades.

Things started much, much earlier than Deku's death. That was the nail in the coffin for them all, but there's a reason why Shouta went back as early as he could manage instead of just going back to *that* day and jumping in front of the kid.

His phone rings. Hizashi again.

"Weirdo," he mutters, sending the call to voicemail. "Now. What was their school's name? Aldera? Ordera? That's a middle school though, so if he's ten…"

It starts raining - or, it had been raining, but Shouta only notices now. He's in a park that looks like just about every other park in existence, some trees and flowers and water fountains and screaming kids. The usual.

He doesn't remember where he lives at this point in time. Doesn't remember what he was doing on this specific day, wandering around a park in the middle of the day with only his phone and wallet on him. It seems out of character for him at any age.

God, he's tired.

It's a park, so there's benches. He finds one that isn't occupied, ignores his buzzing phone, curls up on it, and passes out almost immediately.

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Shouta comes to a few hours later. There's someone walking towards him with tiny, tiny footsteps. He doesn't sit up right away because he's basking in how few aches and pains he currently has. It's been decades since he woke up in such a good mood.

"'Scuse me, sir? Are you okay?"

Aw.

That's sweet. Annoying since it woke him up, but sweet. Kids sure are something.

"'M fine. Go play somewhere else, kid."

"O-okay! Sorry for bothering you!" Those tiny footsteps run in the opposite direction. Presumably off to pick dandelions or eat dirt.

Shouta rolls over and watches a head of fluffy green hair dart to the jungle gym. Blearily, he wonders what the likelihood would be of there being two green-haired children that have more kindness than is good for them. After pondering that for a beat, he sits up and decides he isn't nearly that lucky.

There's half a dozen kids hanging around and playing innocently when he starts walking in the direction his problem child went off in.

Of course, his problem child isn't one of those peaceful kids. His problem child is the one getting chased by three other non-peaceful kids. Midoriya is already bruised and panting, and his tiny (tiny! Deku's never been very tall, but this one is so small. Shouta wonders if he guessed his age wrong, because that kid looks way too small to be ten) legs are pumping as fast as he can make them go. The kids chasing him are obviously brats - one of them is flying overhead, circling and spitting on Midoriya when he passes. Another is throwing

rocks, the third is cackling like a hyena, and the last one is, unsurprisingly, Bakugou Katsuki.

Bakugou is the one who catches Midoriya, who in return is already crying. Shouta gives up any hope that this is some heroes vs. villains play-fight when the hand gripping Midoriya's wrist sparks and burns pale - already scarred - flesh. Midoriya yelps and tries to jump back, but Bakugou's holding onto him too tightly and already preparing himself to set off another explosion with his free hand, right near Midoriya's face.

Shouta sighs, activates his quirk, and says, "It's my day off, you know. I shouldn't have to be babysitting some villain wanna-bes."

"EH?" Bakugou yells, charming as ever. "Whaddya want, old man?"

His cronies chime in with, "Yeah!" "What, old man!" "Old man!"

"I want you to stop harassing and bullying this kid," Shouta says bluntly. "But for now I'll settle for you going away before I call the cops for illegal quirk usage. Or beat your scrawny asses for annoying me."

Bakugou lets go of Midoriya, who collapses to the ground and scrambles away from his tormentor. The brat stalks forward and holds his palms up threateningly at Shouta. "I'm gonna be a hero, you know! I'll beat *your* ass!"

"You won't be a hero with that kind of attitude. Beating on someone who won't fight back is what villains do." Bakugou snarls, then snarls louder when his quirk continues to not work. Shouta is unimpressed. "Scram, kid."

There's some more hemming and hawing, but when it's clear that Shouta won't budge, the brats grumble and send some parting shots ("Freak needs a fucking hobo to save him, what a loser - ") before disappearing across the street. Midoriya is trembling on the ground and still a bit teary, but it's mostly overshadowed by the way he's looking at Shouta with a mix of apprehension and adoration.

Weird.

"Kid, let me see your arm. That looks like it hurts."

Midoriya swipes at his eyes and shakes his head. "It's okay! Kacchan does this all the time, 'm used to it. S'not so bad."

In three sentences, Shouta has now learned more about why his problem child is such a problem child than he did in two decades of teaching and working with the man. If he wasn't equally reticent when talking about his past, he'd wonder why Midoriya never brought this up to him the first time around.

Shouta crouches down next to him and carefully reaches out for his arm. Midoriya looks like a confused puppy, head tilting this way and that as Shouta peers at the burns on his arm. "You know that it's wrong of him to do that, right? He shouldn't hurt you."

"Oh, well. K-kacchan's gonna be a hero, y'know, and I'm just. Me."

"Heroes don't hurt people." Shouta pauses, considers the fact that he just blatantly lied, and corrects it to, "Well, they don't hurt people like that. You should punch him back."

Midoriya sucks in a sharp breath. "Oh n-no, no. No. He wouldn't like that. And I'm just. He'd be r-really mad! Really really mad. It's really not that bad, really."

Shouta raises an eyebrow, then holds up Midoriya's bright red arm. There's multiple layers of burns in varying stages of healing, and more than a few scars. "Really?"

His face flushes as red as the burns on his arm. "Um."

"Well, regardless. A pro-hero shouldn't encourage illegal quirk usage, but if you did use your quirk against him, I wouldn't fault you for it when he's clearly been using you as a glorified punching bag for awhile."

He wilts immediately. Slumps, tugs his arm out of Shouta's grip, and backs up a few steps. "Oh. I. Well, I couldn't even if I wanted to. I'm quirkless."

Shouta's mouth says, "Fuck," before his brain can catch up.

Midoriya curls in on himself further. "Um. Sorry?"

"What are you apologizing for? You didn't do anything wrong. I just didn't realize those kids were bullying you because of that. That's way different than them just not liking you. Do your teachers know? They should have the kids in counseling for quirk discrimination."

The kid glances up. He recites, with the certainty that comes from

being told something frequently, “Teachers say it’s not their responsibility to coddle sensitive kids like me. I need to toughen up, especially since I’m already at a disadvantage and weaker than the other kids, so it won’t benefit me if they fight my battles for me.”

Shouta wouldn’t claim that he’s a great teacher - he’s cold and stern in a way that intimidates even the boldest kids. He expels more kids than he teaches, but those that he teaches, he thinks he does a decent enough job. Thus, he feels more than qualified to say, “You’ve had shitty teachers. That’s fucked up.”

He shrugs. For a young kid who just admitted he has been discriminated against for a number of years, he seems remarkably unbothered. Even now, minutes after he had been harassed by a bunch of punks, he’s brushing himself off and perking up.

Shouta's been in the past for, at most, a few hours, and he’s learning more about his problem child than he learned in literal decades of knowing the brat. He wishes Deku was around so he could kick his ass.

Instead, he’s stuck with a knobby-kneed, traumatized child who thinks he’s quirkless.

“Sir, um. C-can I ask you something?”

“You already did, but I can spare another. What is it?”

The kid visibly steels himself. Clenches his fists, straightens his shoulders, and looks him in the eye. “Um. Your quirk. You used it to stop Kacchan from using his? So, um, was it dependent on eye contact or just concentration?”

Scratch that. He’s stuck with a knobby-kneed, traumatized child *genius* who thinks he’s quirkless .

what does a pro-hero want with a quirkless little boy

Chapter Summary

Shouta meets Inko again.

Chapter Notes

wow!!! you're all great!!!! thank you all for reading and giving my fic a chance - all of the comments have been looked at and loved and appreciated at least three times each, improving my day immensely every time <3 i hope you all continue to enjoy!

i promise we're getting to family fluff very very soon!!! gotta set the stage for inko to be able to adopt their new boy ;) hope you all enjoy! thanks again ~

As they knock on the Midoriyas' apartment door, Shouta puts a hand on Midoriya's head and forces him to look up at him. His head cocks to the side curiously.

"In the future," Shouta says softly. "If a stranger offers to take you home or acts too familiarly, you really should run and get someone you know or a police officer. Okay?"

Midoriya's eyebrows furrow. "Um. Okay?"

The door swings open before he can ask why that seems like brand-new advice, and a familiar face ducks out. "Izuku! Did you forget your key again? I keep telling you to put it on a lanyard, dear, I swear you'd lose your head if it wasn't attached."

"M-mom! We have a guest!"

"Guest is stretching it," Shouta says blandly. He holds out a hand to Inko Midoriya, who suddenly looks up at him. What is it like to be a parent who automatically bends over to look at their kid first? Who automatically adjusts to look at waist-height, where a child's eyes would be? She hadn't even noticed him until she had ascertained that her son was well. In all his years as a teacher, he had never grown instincts like that towards any of his charges. "Mrs. Midoriya, my name's Shouta Aizawa. I don't want to invite myself in, but there's a few matters I'd like to speak to you about."

She shakes his hand a little warily. Her eyes dart down to Izuku, who blinks back up at her guilelessly. “Of course. Please, come in. Izuku, please go clean up? You look like you were rolling around in the dirt again.”

“Yes’m!” He turns to Shouta, bows and says, “Thank you again, sir!”, then darts into the apartment and disappears from sight.

“Kids are so energetic.” He yawns. “Makes me tired, if I’m being honest. I don’t know how parents put up with it.”

Something about what he said, or how he said it, puts Inko at ease. She laughs, shoulders releasing some tension, and she ushers him in. “You get used to it pretty quickly. Learn how to take naps when they’re not looking. Cup of wine when they’re asleep.”

“A cup?”

“Our glasses didn’t survive the terrible twos. I might upgrade from plastic cups when Izuku gets to high school and he doesn’t drop everything.” She rolls her eyes fondly. “My clumsy little dope. He’s a sweetheart, really.”

Shouta would use a lot of words to describe Midoriya. “Sweetheart” is something his friends might use, but Shouta would rather use, “pain in the ass.” He doesn’t say that to this Inko, though, because she doesn’t know him yet and would likely think he was just a stranger being a jerk to her only son.

Inko leads him to the couch and asks, “Can I get you something to drink?”

“No, thank you.”

She takes a seat across from him in a chair that looks like something a grandma would knit in and asks, “Then how can I help you, Mr. Aizawa?”

“Hm, it’s not really that kind of situation. I just wanted to bring a few things to your attention. Primarily, the fact that I had to stop three little shits from wailing on your son.” His phone is, once again, buzzing in his pocket. Hizashi must be feeling particularly needy today. “Did you know that he’s being bullied for not having a quirk? It seems to be an ongoing thing.”

Her lips tighten. “Unfortunately, yes. I didn’t know they were

bothering him outside of school too, though."

"Bothering? They were beating him."

"Izuku is upset by harsh words like that. He won't tell me anything if I call it what it is." She gives him a forced smile. "Thank you for bringing it to my attention. That's more than what anyone else has tried to do in the past. It means a lot, Mr. Aizawa."

"Your standards are pitifully low."

Inko's smile becomes less forced. "And yet, here you are rising above them. I appreciate it regardless."

They're silent for a moment while the shower starts. Shouta absentmindedly wonders how much the hot water must hurt on the burns Bakugou gave him. He wonders if Deku's insane pain tolerance started much earlier than when he started breaking every bone in his body.

"Would you agree to me training Izuku in self-defense? He seems like he needs it."

Inko stares at him. He stares back, unaffected. Slowly, she says, "You'll understand my hesitance to let a random man start having lessons with my vulnerable child. I don't know you."

"I'm Shouta Aizawa. Pro-hero Eraserhead. Feel free to look me up." He pulls out his wallet and hands her his hero license for good measure.

The ID is scrutinized, turned towards the light, flipped around, and felt all over. Shouta isn't sure what information she's gleaning from her investigation, but if it makes her feel better about his interest, she can knock herself out.

She eventually hands it back to him and asks, "What does a pro-hero want with a quirkless little boy?"

"Train him. He wants to be a hero, right? I'm sure he finds his fair share of trouble."

Tension returns to her posture. Her demeanor is noticeably warier as she asks, "There's a lot of kids that want to be heroes. Even more kids that find themselves in trouble. Why my son?"

To think that Inko Midoriya had been even more protective before

Izuku went to U.A. Shouta has always had the utmost respect for parents that aren't total dicks to their kids, but he'll admit he had once thought Inko was a spineless wimp. He respected her for raising someone as difficult as Izuku, but he thought she was a pushover and that her lack of authority was why Izuku continued to recklessly endanger himself.

After U.A. began boarding and the kids moved into the dorms, Shouta quickly realized that Inko Midoriya is far from spineless, has never been a pushover, and is, in fact, someone to rely on in just about any situation. She cares for her son with a viciousness that Shouta sees more often in rabid dogs than parents - if she had been dealing with Izuku being discriminated against for the entirety of his formative years, he can understand her intensity. There were many times where he walked in on her and Nedzu having tea with smiles and exchanging cold words.

(Nedzu once told Shouta that Inko was his favorite human.)

Deku, because he was always a moron, never knew how many battles his mom had fought for him behind the scenes while he was busy breaking himself over and over again. Saving him from having to pay for property damage, from having to face consequences for actions that weren't his fault but could've been pinned on him if anyone dumber than his mom had been speaking in his favor… Maybe this time around he'll be able to convince the brat to be a little more aware and grateful.

Shouta says, "Your son seems like he needs someone in his corner," and it isn't a lie. From the minute Deku walked into his classroom all those years ago (five years from now), he knew that this was a kid who felt like it was him against the world. He's only just realizing that there was more to that belief than teenage arrogance, but Shouta's never been one to let stagnant beliefs fester. He thought Deku was an angsty brat, now he knows he's an angsty brat with childhood trauma. Different approaches are necessary.

And Toshinori used to accuse him of being insensitive.

"Kids with flashy quirks don't need a hand up. The Bakugou brat that was giving Izuku a hard time - he'll be told every day that he's going to be successful. Maybe not in so many words, but by teachers' actions and adults fawning over him even when he's acting like a little shit." He snorts, crossing his arms and leaning back in his seat. "It's kids like yours that need extra support. He's a smart kid, and I can tell he has a

good heart. That's infinitely more useful in life than someone who can punch really hard or blow things up."

Inko's head tilts - something he said makes her eyes soften once more, and she gives him a tired smile. "Mr. Aizawa, I'm a single mother. I can't pay you."

Shouta scoffs. "I don't need your money. I'm a teacher - I like teaching. I think I'd like teaching your kid if he'll take it seriously. That's all."

She raises an eyebrow. "Are you sure you can afford to teach him for free? Forgive me, but you look to be going through a rough patch."

Shouta rolls his eyes. "Just because I don't bother with my hair - "

"You clearly haven't showered in at least a week," Inko says bluntly. "Likely more, but I don't want to assume. Your nails are filthy, and with how pale you are, I'd be surprised if you aren't at least somewhat anemic. You're dehydrated and thinner than a pro-hero should be. So either you're not a pro-hero and you're trying to take advantage of my son, or you're new, haven't signed with an agency yet, and are just arrogant enough to think that you can succeed as a hero without taking into account how much your diet and environment play into your capabilities."

Ouch.

He holds his hands out in front of him, noting the way they tremble ever-so-slightly and the pale gauntness. She's right that his nails are caked in dirt and grime. It says something about the state he's in that Inko had to be the one to point out that he traveled back to what was probably the lowest era of his life.

Good to know he was wrong about Izuku's age - he had been concerned about how small the boy seemed. Shouta must be somewhere around twenty, meaning Izuku is seven or eight.

He finally knows why he was in that park - It's one of the few places he can safely catch a nap during the day. Plus, there's a tree right inside of the forest that has a hole in its stump just big enough for him to fit his sleeping bag when he's not using it. It was adequate enough shelter for the transition phase between attending U.A. himself and building enough of a reputation to become a reputable (and, therefore, adequately paid) hero without an agency backing him.

“Hm. I forgot that I’m currently homeless.” He shrugs. “Regardless. I won't charge you.”

It’s barely a lie.

(Not a great one, but fairly true nonetheless.)

“You *forgot* ?”

He shrugs again. “It’s been an interesting day.”

They sit in silence for a few moments before Shouta decides he’s done with this interaction. Either she’ll let him train Izuku or she won’t and he’ll go behind her back - he doesn’t have any other option. It’ll be easier with Inko’s help, but he has too much to accomplish and he needs Deku for it to work.

He stands up and bows. “Please consider my offer. I’ll leave my number with you and you can - “

“Oh, none of that.” She waves her hands, and when he stares at her blankly, she reaches out and gently pushes him back into his seat. “You have nowhere to stay, right?”

“I did just say that I was - “

“You’ll stay with us at least for tonight. I wouldn’t be able to live with myself if I didn’t send you off with a hot meal and a good night of sleep.”

“Mrs. Midoriya - “

“Assuming that you aren’t here to murder us in our sleep, we’ll talk about the details tomorrow. I wouldn’t feel right having you teach Izuku without any compensation, so perhaps a place to stay can be payment for now. We can work out the details after you’ve rested.”

Shouta’s throat is tight. He croaks, “You’re being too generous.”

“You’re underestimating how rare it is for us to find people who treat us kindly once they find out Izuku is quirkless. It’s selfish, but I like to keep the few decent people in the world close once I find them.” She smiles at him brightly and pats his head, then retreats to the kitchen. “We’re having katsudon for dinner - is that fine with you?”

Shouta has had a long day. He lays down on the couch, throws an arm over his eyes, and murmurs, “Sure, whatever,” before sliding into a

short nap.

blue's better than orange, but orange is better than purple

Chapter Summary

First family dinner

Chapter Notes

i am so SO grateful for all of you readers who have been enjoying this - thank you for your kudos and nice words <3 every time i get an email from ao3 it legit brightens my day so much and reminds me that even though the world's kinda funky right now, there's still a lot of good <3

this is one of my favorite chapters i've written so far, with a TON of fluffy feels and a cliched rewrite of the "can someone quirkless be a hero" scene, and i hope i do it justice~ thank you for reading! please enjoy <3

Shouta wakes up some time later to the sound of a child gasping in delight and a mother laughing. It makes him want to gag, if he's being honest, because that kind of sweetness is sickening.

It doesn't stop him from sitting up and ruffling Izuku's hair when the kid walks over. He's vibrating with excitement as he says, "Mr. 'Zawa! Mom's making katsudon!"

"So I heard."

"Katsudon's my favorite!"

"Is it?"

"Mm-hm!" Izuku pauses for a moment, then asks, "What's your favorite, Mr. 'Zawa?"

"My favorite?" He scrubs at his eyes tiredly and hums in thought. "Jelly."

Izuku nods solemnly. "Jelly is good. I like red flavor."

"Red's good. Blue's good too."

"Ick."

“Ick? Blue’s better than orange, though.”

Izuku’s face scrunches up in thought, like this is the most important conversation he’s ever had. After a long silence, he says, “I think blue is better than orange, but orange is better than purple.”

He tries not to roll his eyes and somehow succeeds. “I’m *so* glad we could find common ground.”

For some reason, his halfhearted response has Izuku beaming at him.

And this characterizes the rest of the night. Shouta gives lackluster responses, shovels food into his mouth rudely, and barely keeps from falling asleep at the table. In return, Inko and Izuku smile and chatter happily. Inko gives him seconds even when he protests, and Izuku talks at length about a new teacher at his school that has a quirk that lets him affect how light reflects off of objects.

“ - and I wanted to ask if he can cause visual hallucinations because eyes only work since there’s light so there’s gotta be ways he can alter - well, unless it’s a physical affectation rather than a perceptual one… I’d have to see if he can trigger solar panels or some other light-sensing technology to see if it’s physical or if it’s perceptual - “

Inko picks up their plates and takes them into the kitchen, humming distractedly at Izuku’s babbling in absentminded encouragement. Izuku grabs the utensils and glasses, continuing his speech about Mr. What’s-His-Name. Their routine must be well-established, as neither of them falter or even look at each other as they put dishes into the sink for Inko to wash. Inko hands the cleaned items to Izuku, who dries them when he remembers to take a breath, then dashes off to put them away one-by-one.

Shouta never had a functional family, so he’s not sure if this is normal or if the Midoriyas are straight out of a slice-of-life manga. He can’t tell if the feeling in his throat is jealousy or indigestion.

Inko clearly loves her son, just as much as her son adores her. Shouta is hard-pressed to remember what his mother looked like, and he knows he never looked at her with anything other than a quiet sadness. He was a quiet kid who grew into a quiet, bitter adult that is just depressed enough to accept his lot in life, just arrogant enough to think he can save others, and just desperate enough to try over and over and over -

Before his thoughts can start spiraling, a small hand tugs at his shirt.

Izuku holds up the cup Inko had been drinking from with his other hand and asks, “Mr. ‘Zawa, I can’t reach. Can you put this back?”

He takes it automatically. “Where?”

“Up, to the left - Yeah, there! Can you put this up there too?”

And, completely seamlessly, they welcome him.

Inko washes, Izuku dries, and Shouta is sent to put items in their proper places. It doesn’t escape his notice that Izuku is just tall enough to reach where the majority of plates and cups are kept, but no one draws attention to the fact that there’s no real reason he needs to help. The chattering about mundane topics continues with little input from Shouta, who is busy trying to figure out their convoluted organizational system.

When the sink is turned off and Inko and Izuku have finished exchanging an overly enthusiastic high-five, Inko turns to Shouta. She wipes her hands on the apron around her waist and says, “Izuku, Mr. Aizawa here said that he was a teacher earlier. Maybe he can help you with that math you’ve been struggling with…?”

Izuku spins and looks at him with an utterly gobsmacked expression. “You’re a teacher?! But you’re so *nice* !”

Shouta says, “Your standards are incredibly low if you consider me nice.”

“You’re SO nice! You haven’t yelled at me once or told me to shut up or glared at me *and* you know I’m quirkless!” Izuku is bouncing on his feet. “That’s amazing!”

“It’s really not.”

“Honey, that’s not all.” Inko’s lips are curled into a gentle, mischievous smile. It somehow manages to fill Shouta with an uncalled for dread. “He’s a teacher and - you can keep a secret, Izuku, right?”

Izuku nods so furiously that Shouta fears his head will bob off and roll under the table. “I can keep a secret! I’m really good at keeping secrets!” He mimes zipping his lips shut and throwing away the key.

“You can’t tell anyone at school about this, but Mr. Aizawa here - “ she points at him, as if there’s anyone else in the house that could be

mistaken for being him. “Is not only a teacher, but also a pro-hero.”

For one, singular moment, the entire apartment is silent. Inko’s eyes crinkle as her smile widens.

In the next, Izuku’s eyes widen and he *shrieks* . Shouta flinches.

“MR. ‘ZAWA IS A NICE TEACHER *AND* A HERO?! THAT’S AMAZING I CAN’T BELIEVE WE HAVE A REAL *ACTUAL* HERO HERE A REAL ACTUAL HERO SAVED ME AND BROUGHT ME HOME AND WEATEDINNERWITHAPROHEROMOMTHAT’SSOCOOLMR.’ZAWAISSOCOO - “

“Breathe, baby.”

Izuku takes a dramatic gasp of breath before rounding on Shouta. “MR. ‘ZAWA YOU’RE THE COOLEST CAN I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH WHAT’S YOUR HERO NAME WHAT DO YOU TEACH CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR QUIRK WHAT’S IT LIKE BEING A HERO CAN I SEE YOUR HERO LICENSE CAN I - “

Shouta, pretty sure that his ears are about to explode, cuts in with, “If you use your inside voice when asking, I’ll answer your questions.”

Izuku’s mouth immediately shuts, he closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, before nodding firmly. He’s still vibrating and bouncing in place, clearly delighted, but the next time he talks it’s not on par with a banshee’s wail. “Can I have your autograph please Mr. ‘Zawa and what’s your hero name and what do you teach and what’s your quirk and can I see your hero license please and - “ he pauses suddenly, and in that pause, at least half of his energy leaks out of his teeny tiny body. His bouncing slows to a fidget, and he ducks his head.

Shouta sighs, then kneels down in front of him. Gently, he props Izuku’s chin up with one finger, forcing him to make eye contact. “Yes, I’ll give you my autograph. My hero name is Eraserhead - I’m an underground hero, so you probably haven’t heard of me. I’m not an official teacher yet, but I’m going to teach heroics and general studies, and I’ve taught self-defense and hand-to-hand in the past. My quirk is Erasure, which stops people from using their quirks. I’ll show you my hero license later when I sign whatever you want me to sign. And you clearly have one more question that you want to ask, so spit it out.”

“Um. I just. You know that I’m quirkless.” His eyes dart towards the floor.

“Yes, that’s been established already.”

“Um. Do… Do you think that someone quirkless can become a hero?” The second the words leave his lips, barely louder than a whisper, he acts like he’s bracing for a blow, shutting his eyes tightly and scrunching his entire face up into an anxious grimace.

Shouta, admittedly, has rarely thought about what being quirkless must be like. When All Might could no longer use his quirk, the man was essentially quirkless and had struggled with his self-worth and recurring feelings of uselessness and inferiority. Shouta, not one to coddle, had told the man to pick himself up and move the fuck on. He remembers saying, “There’s more to life than a quirk. If you were a hero just because of your quirk, then you’re a shittier guy than even I thought.”

That had worked for All Might, because no matter how much he acted like a kicked puppy when people scolded him, he responded better without kiddie gloves on. Now, with this minute glance into what life is like for someone growing up (presumed) quirkless in a society that puts so much weight on what genetics decided to give them - Shouta can’t imagine what Izuku Midoriya has had to face. He can’t imagine how much this kid has been hurt and beat down, can’t comprehend what’s been put into this kid’s head since age four came and went without any fanfare, what must be going through this kid’s head on a daily basis, and most of all he can’t understand how all of that culminates in a unique, intelligent boy who would tear off his own limbs if it would help someone else and still has the strength to smile and be *kind* .

He reaches out and grasps Izuku’s shoulder tightly, squeezing it solemnly. He says, “Of course. Being a hero isn’t about having any special abilities. It’s about doing the right thing, even if it’s hard. It’s about working hard to protect the people you care about, the people you don’t care about, and even the people you hate. If you’re willing to work hard and work smart, then you can absolutely be a hero.”

He isn’t surprised that both Midoriyas burst into tears, but Izuku tackling him into a decidedly fierce hug for a seven-or-maybe-eight-he-thinks-year-old is a little unexpected. Small arms tighten around his neck and threaten to choke him, there’s tears and snot sliding down his collarbone, his ears are ringing with sobs, and his cell phone is buzzing in his pocket *again* .

Shouta sighs. Changing the past has been a nuisance all around so far.

“Can we skip the hysterics and start on your math? You’re like five, what are you even doing? Counting?”

“I’m seven!” Izuku wails, somehow clutching him tighter. “I-I’m t-t-trying to multiply decimals so so s-so I c-can predict hero scores w-when they move up in the ranks!”

Shouta looks over at Inko, who has slid to the floor and is leaning against the cabinet he had to crouch down to put their bowls back into. She’s crying and scrubbing at her face, hiccuping every few breaths. He sardonically asks, “Your son learns new math concepts for fun?”

Inko sniffles and laughs, nods and wipes tears off of her cheeks. “That’s my boy. He’s a smart cookie.”

“You must be proud.” It’s said sarcastically, but Shouta can feel fondness oozing out of him against his will. Without his permission, his hand comes up and pats the fluffy hair tickling his cheek.

She chokes on another laugh and nods again and again and again. “Immensely. And you’re going to take good care of my little hero, right?”

For some reason, that makes Izuku cry harder.

For an odder, more inexplicable reason, it makes Shouta want to cry too.

“Of course,” he says hoarsely.

family is inconvenient but who else will you play pretend with?

Chapter Summary

Shouta doesn't *want* to leave.

Chapter Notes

kindness??? in my comments section??? it's more likely than you think

(aka: thank you all for reading and enjoying ＜3 i'm glad that inko's lowkey adoption of shouta was so well-received, especially b/c it means that her outright adoption of him will likely be well-received as well!!!!!! this was also just added to a collection as well which??? wow??? you all are the best thank u so much ～)

There isn't much to discuss after such an emotional beginning. The next morning, Shouta gracelessly rolls off of the couch, Inko and him drink a cup of coffee together, and she says, "Teach Izuku how to defend himself and how to be a hero, and you can stay on our couch until you get back on your feet or get a better offer. Deal?"

Shouta, knowing that he won't intrude longer than he has to and this will be a non-issue soon enough, says, "Deal."

"Get settled in for a few days, we'll talk about what you'll be training him this weekend and what your long-term plans are. We'll wait to tell Izuku until we've ironed out the details. Otherwise, he'll get so excited he won't sleep until you wear him out with your plan."

"Noted."

"And if you wouldn't mind walking him to school in the mornings - if you have the time, I mean - I would appreciate it. I have to leave for work so he normally goes with Katsuki, but if there's any other option…"

It's a minuscule favor, in the grand scheme of things. "Sure."

"Great! I'll write out our morning routine and what he'll need some help on - Izuku's pretty good about getting his backpack together, but we've had some mishaps in the past with him losing his lunchbox or

forgetting homework assignments, so a second pair of eyes won't go amiss."

"Sure. Whatever you need."

Inko beams and reaches over to pat his hand lightly. "You're a good kid. Let me know if you need anything, I'll be heading to the store after work and picking up groceries. Izuku can give you my number."

"You're really lucky that the homeless guy you took in isn't a complete psycho who will take advantage of your reckless generosity."

She finishes her coffee, grinning while she stands up and grabs her briefcase. "I'm incredibly lucky, Mr. Aizawa. I won't deny it. Help yourself to anything in the kitchen, dear. I'll be home around six!" She clears her throat, then yells louder, "Izuku! Mr. Aizawa is going to take you to school - I'm off!"

Tiny feet slap against the floor, followed by a messy mop of green bedhead and a mouth covered in toothpaste. Izuku - still so small that Shouta struggles to reconcile him with the image of Deku he has in his head - smiles through his toothbrush and waves with his free hand. He lets out a garbled, "Bye Mama!" as Inko blows him a kiss.

They're sickeningly sweet. Shouta kind of wants to gag as Inko walks out the door, kind of wants to lay on the couch and bask in their warmth until he forgets the world he came from and how he got here in the first place.

He makes a token effort at cleaning himself up some, but he's never been one for excessive grooming even when he had access to equipment for it. Inko had been kind enough to give him a spare toothbrush the night before, so he at least brushes his teeth and finger brushes his hair. By the time he's finished, Izuku is dressed and shoving books and papers into his bookbag.

"Mr. 'Zawa - "

"Let's get you to school. If you start asking questions now, we won't make it out the door. You have everything you need?"

"Mmhm!" He darts past Shouta to sit down near the front door to start pulling on a pair of garishly red sneakers. "Today's Wednesday and we're having an assembly today about not doing drugs and stuff and I heard a rumor that Copter Raptor is running it! He was injured a few weeks ago so it'd make sense if his agency was using his recovery time

as an opportunity for building his public image up but I hope he isn't too injured because that'd be sad and while I'm excited to see him I don't want - "

"Alright, yes, I agree. That's a good guess for why he'd be there, if he's going to be there. Now let's go before you're late."

The walk is like any other walk with an energetic child would be. Izuku babbles about whatever whim passes his mind at the time, Shouta listens with half an ear and tries not to fall asleep standing up, and he makes sure Izuku doesn't accidentally walk into a telephone pole. During all of this, he ignores Hizashi's repeated calls and lets his phone ring out over and over again.

This is the routine for the rest of the week.

After taking an hour to go pick up the few belongings he still had, he would either go on patrol during the day, pick up odd jobs, or start mapping out what he's going to need to accomplish in the next few years to ensure a better future than the one he left. Despite the strange circumstances, Shouta feels like he's taking a vacation. When he's finished with whatever task he's taken on for the day, he walks Izuku home from school, gets him a snack on the way home, and keeps him entertained until Inko comes home and cooks dinner. They clean dishes together, settle in for a movie, or Izuku pulls one or both of them into playing some sort of game.

Shouta, if he were the kind of man to get embarrassed, would be red in the face admitting that he's become extremely proficient at playing "heroes and villains" with Izuku.

("Just for a few minutes," Izuku had pleaded with those large, glistening eyes of his. "You gotta be the villain and chase me and I'm the hero and I'll run away or I can be the villain and chase you but you're already a hero so it wouldn't be playing pretend that way and - "

"How," Shouta asked slowly. "Can you possibly. Have. This much. Energy."

Izuku proceeded to fall over and beg and plead at Shouta's feet until the man sighed and said, "Ten second head start. Get going." He justified it later as practice for when Shouta will really start to train him, since this game is essentially themed tag.

Izuku shrieked every time Shouta caught him underneath his armpits,

swinging him around in a circle before letting the kid wriggle out of his grasp. Inko eventually sent them outside so they wouldn't accidentally break anything and thus cemented grass stains as a permanent addition to Shouta's wardrobe.)

By the end of the week, with how frequently Izuku wants to play and how weak Shouta is to the problem child's doe-eyes, Inko has enough photographic evidence to ruin Eraserhead's reputation forever.

It's unnervingly comfortable to slip into their lives and start caring about them. He had figured that mini-Deku would reel him in against his will, the way he made friends with just about anyone who sat still long enough and wasn't actively murdering someone else, but he hadn't expected the intensity of it. He hadn't expected how much Inko's kindness would get under his skin.

Quiet cups of coffee in the morning, when the sun's just starting to rise, is company he doesn't mind. Without his consent, he perks up when he hears Izuku's alarm go off. He has to bite back grins when Izuku comes barreling out of his room to hug his mother and wait patiently for Shouta to poke his forehead with a grumbled, "Your breath stinks, problem child."

On Saturday morning, Izuku is sleeping in like any kid would. Inko doesn't work weekends, so she pours them both a second cup after she finishes her first. She raises an eyebrow at him, waiting to see if he'll start the conversation they need to have - and Shouta realizes *he doesn't want to leave.*

In his mind, the conversation would end with him getting Inko to approve the training plan he had put together, thanking her for her hospitality, and walking out the door with his sleeping bag and the toothbrush Inko was nice enough to buy for him. He'd pick a different park so he wouldn't run into Izuku outside of their designated training times and he'd make sure to spend his next paycheck on a gym membership so he could shower and let Inko think he had found somewhere to stay.

Shouta never thought he would be so selfish as to consider intruding longer than he already had. Already, some part of his stupid, defective brain is whispering offers he could make to convince Inko to let him continue mooching off of her. He'll pay partial rent, he'll do the grocery shopping, he'll learn how to cook, he'll walk Izuku to and from school and help with his homework, he'll beat the crap out of Bakugou next time the kid lays a hand on Izuku, he'll clean and do

whatever she wants him to if she'll let him keep basking in their warmth.

Ick.

He shakes his head, trying to knock the pathetic desperation out. He's really the most pitiful option they picked for this mission, isn't he? A selfish bastard who's already getting distracted by the first people to give him a hot meal, putting his wants before the world's needs -

"What has you thinking so hard, Shouta?"

He sips at his mug and sighs. "Nothing important. I'm assuming you want to discuss Izuku's training."

"That, and I think it'd be good for us to talk about getting you settled in more."

Shouta shakes his head immediately. "Unnecessary. I'll be out of your hair by the end of the day."

One time, when Shouta was on patrol, he saw a kitten. It was small and adorable. The pitiful thing was cuddled up against a lump of what must have been its mother, crying and mewing until Shouta dragged it away. He went to take it to the closest vet, but it died before he got there. For some reason, whether it was because of the dead cats or if the dead cats were merely what pushed him over the edge, he had called off patrol for the first time in years to get outrageously drunk and lie in bed for three days straight.

The look Inko gives him makes him feel ten times worse than the dead kitten did.

"O-oh. I - Did you already find another place?" she asks with painfully forced cheer. Her smile makes him feel sick.

"I have - "

"I was actually - Oh, well, I guess it doesn't matter."

"What?"

She shakes her head. "You're going to think I'm silly, but I spoke with the landlord, Mrs. Watanabe, and it turns out there's a unit opening up down the hall that has four bedrooms. She was saying that it'd be okay for us to move there even though the lease for the year isn't up

yet.” Inko gives him a sheepish smile and puts her mug down to ring her hands together. “B-but! If you already found a place, I guess that won’t be necessary.”

Shouta stares at her long enough that she starts blushing and avoids his eyes, mumbling something unintelligible under her breath. In disbelief, he asks, “Do you *want* me to stay?”

She somehow ducks her head further and mutters, “I wouldn’t want to pressure you - “

“Yes or no. Do you want me, a homeless idiot who has to be reminded to eat and wants to teach your son how to throat punch villains, to stay?”

Inko says, “I didn’t know that a throat punch was all that different than a regular punch.”

“Inko.”

“Well!” She fidgets, doesn’t meet his eyes, then sighs and slumps in her seat. “Yes. Okay? And I realize it’s ridiculous. You’re a grown man and I’m sure you have your own life and places to be and people your age to meet and have fun with but you make Izuku so *happy* and it’s selfish but I’ve been sleeping better knowing that someone as capable as you is here and walking my son to and from school - do you know when the last time I saw my son so happy was? This is the first week where he hasn’t come home with injuries that he’s too afraid to talk to me about and that’s not a coincidence so of course I want you to stay and I’m sorry to put this on you and I’m sorry - “ here, she hiccups and her eyes start watering. “I’m sorry that I’m taking advantage of your kindness and now I’m crying all over you - “

“Please stop crying,” he says, pained. “I’ll stay if you stop crying. I was just being polite.”

“Huh?”

“I thought I was being considerate by leaving. I don’t actually have anywhere else to go.”

She sniffles. “You don’t?”

“I was going to find a bench to sleep on.” It’s silent as Inko stares at him incredulously, her tears drying the longer she judges him. He adds, “It’s not as bad on your back as you’d think.”

“Please don’t sleep on a bench. We’ll get you a bed once we move to the bigger apartment.”

“I don’t want to make you move. The couch is fine.”

“The couch is fine because you’re so young. Give it five years and you’ll need a chiropractor on call if you keep sleeping there.”

The sad thing - she’s almost right. He did need regular appointments for his back once he hit thirty. Whether it’s due to his years sleeping in strange places or age or hero injuries he sustained is unclear, but sleeping on a couch that looks older than him probably won’t help.

“I don’t want to be an inconvenience.”

Inko says, “Family never is, and I’d like you to join ours. Please stay.”

It’s a blatant lie. Family is the most inconvenient thing there is. It’s emotions and obligation tied up in a neat little package called “Dysfunction” and mailed with no return-to-sender address. Family has never been anything more than an albatross around his neck, waiting for him to slip up and pounce when he’s at his most vulnerable.

Because it’s already been established that Shouta is a selfish, pathetic bastard who doesn't know when to quit *trying*, he says, “Okay,” then leaves to wake Izuku up because he can’t stand to look at Inko’s beaming face any longer.

clementine-flavored vodka

Chapter Summary

Adult problems are never as complicated as they think they are.

Chapter Notes

u know, i wasn't going to post this for a few more days, but i was getting so many "shouta answer ur phone hizashi must be worried SICK" comments that i couldn't help myself... this chapter will put those worries to rest and raise plenty of new ones!!! (new worries will be partially addressed in the ch6 and the rest are for a later date sorry i don't make the rules i just write them)

thank u all again for being such a great audience!!! i write because i like writing but you all make it a lot more worthwhile to do what i like. i can't adequately express how much i appreciate that <3 i hope u enjoy this chapter!

At the start of the next week, Shouta is walking Izuku home from school and preparing himself for how loud the kid's going to be when he tells him about his plans to train him. He gave up on figuring out the gentlest way to break it to the kid yesterday, knowing damn well that Izuku's going to lose his mind and shriek with joy no matter how Shouta words his offer. He knew that Deku had been an intense fanboy, but Deku was downright apathetic compared to Izuku's fanaticism.

The things kids clutch onto when the world is beating them down.

They're lucky that Izuku latched onto heroes rather than something weird like dolls or porn.

Ick.

His phone is once again buzzing away. He grabs it, denies the call, and shoves it back into his pocket. Izuku, with his hands hooked on the straps of his backpack, looks at his pocket intently. Shouta raises an eyebrow at him, but Izuku's too busy staring at his pocket and furrowing his eyebrows together in concentration.

Shouta says, "What do you think about - " at the same time that Izuku finally blurts out, "Why don't you ever answer your phone even

though it rings all the time?"

Well then.

After an awkward pause, Shouta coughs. "And here I thought I was being discreet."

"If someone's bothering you Mom can help you get a new number, we did that after Dad left because he wouldn't stop calling and Mom said that wasn't okay and I had to memorize the new number which was hard but I bet you could memorize a new number easy Mr. 'Zawa 'cause you're really really smart!"

Shouta considers addressing that extremely concerning statement for all of three seconds before deciding that's a problem for another day. He says, "He's bothering me, but it's not the same situation. It's a friend of mine who I don't want to talk to right now."

Izuku frowns. "Why not? If he's a friend wouldn't you want to talk to him? I always want to talk to Kacchan 'cause he's my friend but he's always busy so we don't that often but you're not busy when you're with me - I won't mind if you talk to him! Honest!"

"It's more complicated than that."

Izuku waits expectantly.

Shouta sighs. "Hizashi - my friend - is dealing with a problem right now that makes him... Difficult."

"Difficult?"

"Mean," he simplifies. "It makes him very mean. I don't want to talk to him until he stops being mean, and he won't stop being mean until he deals with his problem."

Izuku's frown deepens and creates creases in his tiny eyebrows. "Kacchan's mean to me all the time but 'cause he's my friend it doesn't matter that he's mean. Is this guy really your friend?"

Shouta is not paid enough, nor is he qualified enough, to deal with that level of fucked up. He says, "Okay, there's a lot to unpack there, but let's start with the most pressing item - you do know that it's not okay that Bakugou is mean to you, right?"

Izuku stares at him blankly.

“Izuku. Bakugou using his quirk on you, yelling at you, harassing you - that’s not okay. It doesn’t matter if he’s your friend or not. No one should treat you like that. If someone’s mean to you, you don’t have to put up with it.”

“Okay Mr. ‘Zawa,” he says agreeably. It’s clearly a placation, which would annoy Shouta more if it wasn’t coming from a seven-year-old who is actively deciding it’s perfectly fine to be taken advantage of and horrifically abused by anyone who says that they’re his friend. Instead, it leaves him feeling nauseous and extremely tired. “But with your friend, I guess you’re saying that he isn’t normally mean so you’re worried.”

“‘Worried’ is a bit of a stretch.”

“What’s the problem he’s having? Maybe we can help him so he can stop being mean and you can talk to him again!”

“It’s complicated, kid. Don’t worry about it.”

“But he’s your friend!” Izuku protests. “That means he’s important! If I can help - “

“You can’t,” he says ruthlessly. “We just have to wait for him to get better. That’s all.”

“But isn’t it better to try? I mean - “

“Look,” Shouta says. “Here’s what we’re dealing with. You think it’s better to get involved with this crap?”

He pulls out his phone, opens his voicemail, and puts it on speaker. Hizashi’s voice - a slurred, drunken mess that is uncomfortably familiar even when it’s been decades since he’s heard it - emerges.

“ShOU I just think - I just think that it’s RIDICULOUS that you AREN’T TALKING TO ME. RIDICLOUS. Absolutely RIDICLOUS. I’m FUN and everyone likes me and no one likes you so why aren’t you answering me you’re such a fuckin’ - you’re a fuckin’ worst ever I don’ wan… You’re such an ASS and you wouldn’t even! You’re not shit, you’re NOT an’ it’s fuckin’ stupid why won’t you pick up your fuckin’ PHONE I JUST WANNA TALK YOU PRICK IT’S NOT LIKE YOU HAVE ANYONE ELSE YOU FUCKIN’ FUCK YOU JUST ALWAYS DO THIS LIKE I DON'T EVEN - “

That’s enough of that. He stops the recording and puts his phone back

into his pocket, grateful that the one he picked was one of the milder calls.

It's familiar in the worst ways. For the better part of their twenties, he and Hizashi were at odds and barely able to tolerate each other for longer than ten minutes at a time. There were periods where they would be on good terms and have their normal friendship, but more often than not, Hizashi's excessive partying and Shouta's employment struggles had them butting heads. The drinking, in particular, had been rough for Shouta to get past when a drunk Hizashi became the same kind of asshole Shouta's dad had been when he was growing up.

When he first arrived in the past, one of the reasons he was able to pinpoint his age as "somewhere in his early twenties" was the fact that Hizashi was in his contacts list as "zashi-chan <3" - the name Hizashi had entered himself way back in high school, day one of their friendship. Shouta had hate-changed the contact to "Yamada" after their infamous Fight when they were twenty-five, which doubled as the catalyst to Hizashi's backing away from pro-hero party life and finally getting sober.

Their friendship is something that Shouta has always cherished in his own way. He's not an affectionate guy, nor does he have any plans on ever being one, but Hizashi is his best friend. Nemuri is another best friend, obviously, but Hizashi was the first person who looked past Shouta's dry and harsh demeanor and decided, "Yeah, let's be friends." That decision meant - *means* - more to Shouta than Hizashi will ever know. Even with decades of ups-and-downs in his memories, he cares about Hizashi in a way that he's never felt about anyone else and he'd do just about anything for the moron.

That doesn't mean that Shouta has any patience to watch Hizashi self-destruct with booze and fame. He didn't the first time around, and he doesn't have any plans to be a part of that this time either. He's a pathetic bastard, but there's boundaries that Shouta set in his formative years that no one will be able to make him cross.

On some level, he was always impressed that Hizashi managed to keep his ranking in the top fifties. He had some close calls - more than he would've if his brain wasn't fermenting in clementine flavored Svedka - but he kept his stupid ass alive and never ranked lower than forty-five. While a lot of that is due to his popularity and his radio show keeping him afloat, just as much is due to him being a genuinely skilled hero with a winning personality and smile. What he could've done if he hadn't spent his twenties trying to drown himself in his

vices - The wasted potential made Shouta that much more frustrated when he'd see him acting stupid and getting dragged by tabloids for stumbling out of a club at four in the morning on a Wednesday. It makes him furious now, knowing how much Hizashi was held back by his shitty decisions even decades into the future.

And somehow, irrationally, he's even more incandescently pissed at Hizashi now that Izuku is looking at his cellphone with a strange, melancholy expression. His best friend is ruining his life and making Izuku pity him for his shit choices. Shouta knows that he's a pathetic bastard, but Hizashi at this point in time is a lot worse.

"It sounds like he misses you," Izuku says quietly.

Shouta scoffs. "If he missed me, he'd stop being a jerk."

"I think he misses you a lot and it'd mean a lot to him if you tried to help him. 'Cause when you're that mad, it's only 'cause you care." He pauses, then adds, "Even if you can't fix it, it helps knowing that someone wants to help. I know you and Mama can't fix how everyone's mean to me at school, but it's nice knowing that you would if you could. "

Shouta's glad they're approaching the apartment now, because how is he supposed to respond to that?

No, they can't fix how the school as a whole treats Izuku. It burns, but there's nothing Shouta can currently do as a new hero. The school thinks Izuku is quirkless and neither he nor Inko has enough money or influence to make them treat him half-decently. Cops are at best useless and at worst actively detrimental to any situation they're brought into. Inko's job means she can't move them to another district, and that's ignoring the fact that the chances of any school accepting a quirkless kid are extremely, pathetically low.

Izuku can't kick up a fuss or fight back, either, or else he'll risk expulsion or at the very least a black mark on his record that will keep him from attending U.A. - actually, due to his status, *any* high school. It's not like any of the teachers will stop to verify if he was the instigator or victim, after all. Once Shouta gets his teaching job back, there will be more leeway there since he'll be able to vouch for him. Until then, Izuku has to keep his head down and play as nice as he can manage.

Shouta and Inko had discussed this at length when fleshing out Izuku's training plan. She had, with abnormally dry eyes, told Shouta that he

has to make sure that Izuku won't use what he's teaching him against his bullies unless absolutely necessary. Shouta had automatically protested. Then, after Inko showed him the depressing statistics about quirkless employment, graduation, and suicide rates, he reluctantly agreed.

It's terrible to think about how Shouta never would've had Izuku as a student if he hadn't held on until his quirk came in. It's a thought that joined the pile of thoughts that already keep him up at night.

Izuku is pretty much saying, "You can't help me or Hizashi, but knowing that you care enough to try is more than enough for me so it's probably the same for your blonde idiot," and it's galling to need a child to tell him that when Shouta knows damn well that Nemuri's periodic texts and lunch dates were all that kept him sane in the years following his problem class's graduation.

He leads the way up the stairs and says, "You're really good at making me realize I'm a terrible person. Thanks."

Izuku's wails and denials trail after him, making Shouta smirk. "Let's see what your mom's planning for dinner. Maybe she'll let us get some ice cream later if it's still light out after."

"Mr. 'Zawa you're not terrible! You know I think you're the coolest -!"

"Even cooler than All Might?"

"That's not fair!"

"I see. Guess I'm getting ice cream alone then."

"Mr. 'Zawa!"

"You know," Shouta starts, ushering Izuku in the door. "You and your mom, for some reason, are letting me hang around for the indefinite future. You can cut the 'mister' stuff. Just 'Aizawa' is fine."

They both kick off their shoes. Izuku says, "Mom says it's rude not to use mister and missus with adults."

"Generally, you should use whatever their preference is. Most adults prefer when kids use honorifics because it's polite. I already know you're plenty polite and I prefer no honorifics. So it's okay."

Izuku looks at him skeptically. “Okay Mr. ‘Zawa,” he says placatingly. “I’m gonna go make a card for your friend. Will you give it to him for me?”

“A card?”

“So he gets better soon! You said we can’t help and just have to wait for him to get better, and cards help. Mama said so. We sent one to Dad when he was sick last year.”

Izuku runs off to his room before Shouta can continue the conversation. Shouta takes this opportunity to collapse on the couch, fling an arm over his eyes, and spend the time until dinner overthinking his options moving forward.

caramel frappuccinos

Chapter Summary

No, Hizashi - Inko is not his sugar mama.

Chapter Notes

did u guys know that me and present mic have the same birthday???? how FITTING that i'm posting the first chapter w/ hizashi in it on july 7th, best day of the year?????? i didn't plan it but i'm legit thrilled that it worked out this way

happy birthday to me and presentation michael, we are not even remotely similar but i feel kinship with this man

(as always: thank you all for your kind words <3 i can tell i shocked some of you with where i took hizashi's arc in this fic but i hope it was a good (if not slightly painful) one!)

Shouta isn't thrilled to be walking into a shitty cafe at eight in the morning laden down with a care package the size of an overweight Rottweiler, but he's not the kind of man to give up on his commitments. He might analyze a situation and ruminate for days, but once he's made his decision he sticks to it.

Even if he already wants to go back to bed. And his head is already aching from how loud this encounter is going to be. And he'd much rather be making Izuku run laps to hopefully exhaust the kid's never-ending enthusiasm. And he had to skip his second cup of coffee with Inko to make it to the cafe in time.

"He's your friend," Shouta mutters, mocking Izuku's tiny voice. "He'll like to know that you care. Give him this card for me, please? Even though I'm an annoying problem child who makes you feel bad for not being as emotionally intelligent as a traumatized seven year old - "

"Are you actually going in or are you just planning on blocking the entrance all day like a fucking idiot?" Some woman barks at him. She's tapping her toes pointedly, arms crossed and a baleful glare leveraged at his face.

Shouta, because he has better things to do than cater to this woman's rage, opens the cafe's door as slowly as physically possible. He stares

her down, blank face a sharp contrast to her reddening one, and takes one step in. Then another.

He inches his way into the cafe at a pace that could generously be called “slow.” He doesn’t break eye contact.

“Are you fucking KIDDING me?! You - “

“Shouta! There you are.” A pale hand grabs his arm and pulls him in. Gentle, in contrast to his abrasive loudness. “Come on, I have a table for us already.”

He’s already being pulled away before he can respond, probably to the joy of the irritating woman who needs more than meditation and a good lay to get that stick out of her ass. What a pain, having to deal with someone like that when his morning is already off to an annoying start.

The blonde dragging him past hipsters and college kids - because of course somewhere “cool” is where Hizashi would make them meet - is dressed down for once. His hair is in a messy braid that doesn’t quite hide the fact that there’s some crud stuck in it. If Shouta had to guess, the consistency of the wet crud points to bile and the sparkly bits are probably confetti. He’s wearing a plain gray sweatshirt that almost covers his knees - something Present Mic would never be caught dead wearing in public - and his shoes are mismatched flip flops.

Shouta is urged to sit down, care package placed at his feet, and between one moment and the next, Shouta sees Hizashi’s face for the first time in a decade.

Clearly, the idiot hasn’t been sleeping. His eye bags are worse than Shouta’s, and Shouta was up until three last night fielding Izuku’s questions about how to throw a proper punch. His lips are chapped, his eyes are red, he’s breaking out near his chin the same way he always did during finals week stress, there’s smudges of some kind of makeup around his eyes and lips, and underneath all of it, Hizashi looks so damn happy to see him.

He’s smiling.

It’s been a long time since Shouta last cried, but he doesn’t think he could ever forget the way it sneaks up on him. His throat aches, his eyes prickle, and he hiccups - and it’s just like the day Deku died, where he suddenly can’t stop it from happening even as he knows it won’t fix anything.

“Shouta? Shouta?! What’s wrong, oh my god are you dying? Am *I* dying? WHy are you cRying I don’t think I’ve ever seen you cry before holy shit what’s wrong - “ In a strange twist, Hizashi isn’t yelling. He’s whispering, voice getting quieter and quieter with every word.

Shouta grunts and wetly says, “This is your fault, idiot.”

“MY FAULT?” There’s the yelling. Shouta was almost worried there for a second.

“You look terrible. I thought I was looking at a zombie. I don’t think anyone who could see your face right now would blame me for reacting like this.” The impact of his statement is compromised by the way he sniffles and hiccups in between sentences. Shouta is experiencing too many feelings to give a damn about that, though.

“You’re so mean!” Hizashi wails, slumping in his seat. “We haven’t talked in months and you’re already being so mean to me!”

“I’m not the one who walked in here with puke in their hair. You’re mean for making me look at that.”

Hizashi’s face is blank for two seconds, before he turns bright red. One of his hands starts to reach for his hair, before stopping halfway through. He instead picks up the napkin on his side of the table and wipes at his face and hair in a futile attempt to clean up some of the mess.

“H-heh, yeah, I guess - Uh, you know how Fridays are - Just a wild night. Didn’t realize how early we were getting together, and it’s not - “

“Look,” Shouta interrupts, wiping his eyes and sighing. It’s weird seeing Hizashi embarrassed. The man’s normally so carefree that this hesitant, ashamed version is strangely foreign. “You know how I feel about your partying. I’m not here to talk about that or lecture you. When you’re ready to get help, I’m here.” He stops, picks up a menu, and says, “Right now, though, we’re just getting coffee.”

Hizashi doesn’t do a good job of hiding his shock. Shouta, because he’s not a total prick, pretends not to notice.

“We’re not talking about your partying or about how I’m getting a caramel frappuccino. Deal?”

Hizashi hoarsely says, “Oh come on, Shouta, how am I supposed to

not say something about that? Mr. 'I want my coffee as black as my soul'?"

"Plain coffee's cheaper. I finally have some extra money, so I'm getting the damn frappuccino."

He brightens up, sitting up straighter. "Did you finally sign with an agency?"

"Not quite. I think I was adopted? Sort of?" Shouta mutters, flipping through the menu. "I'm staying with someone. So I'm not paying rent or anything right now since I'm babysitting her kid. Her name's Inko, kid's name is Izuku."

"You got a SUGAR MAMA? I know we haven't seen each other for awhile but HOW THE FUCK - "

"Ew, no. It's not like that."

"It sure sounds like that!"

They talk about a lot.

Well, actually, in a weird twist of events - *Shouta* talks about a lot. Hizashi's eyes don't leave him once as Shouta tells him about Inko's generosity and Izuku's enthusiasm. He laughs when Shouta explains how Izuku started hyperventilating when Shouta told him he would train him to become a hero. He laughs harder when Shouta tells him about how Inko has limited him to two jelly pouches a day since Izuku has started to mimic him, and Izuku's small enough without skipping meals.

Hizashi seems not only content but downright *thrilled* to listen to Shouta ramble about the Midoriyas. He asks questions and encourages him to expand and explain further. The pro-hero star Present Mic is willingly stepping out of the spotlight for Shouta, of all people.

If Shouta wasn't already convinced that Hizashi was in a bad place, he sure as hell would know for sure at this point.

Eventually, though, Shouta runs out of things to talk about. He's had two frappuccinos, Hizashi's had three cups of tea, and they split a plate of scones. Hizashi looks like a single good breeze would topple him, with how exhausted he looks, but he's staring at Shouta and seems perfectly happy to sit there and smile at him for the foreseeable future.

Shouta doesn't get it. Last time, at this age, he and Hizashi couldn't be in the same room without arguing. He was pretty sure Hizashi hated him, had hated that Shouta was a, "stuck up, pretentious bastard who thinks he's too good for some fun," had thought Shouta was holding him back and felt obligated to be his friend since no one else would be, had thought Shouta was someone to be pitied and looked down on -

But how much of that surety had been tainted by Shouta's own issues at the time? How much had been due to him being stuck in his own problems, constantly worried about where he'd sleep the next night, constantly running himself ragged while trying to prove himself as a legitimate hero? How much of their strife came down to Shouta not knowing how to say, "I'm not mad at you - I'm mad at our situations. I'm mad that you felt like booze was the answer, I'm mad that I'm too pathetic of a hero to save my best friend from himself, I'm mad that even as we're talking I'm trying to remember if I have enough money for a cup of coffee or if I'll have to patrol on an empty stomach again, and I'm so goddamn mad that you keep trying to act like everything is fine and we're not falling apart."

And, with a distance that only decades could provide, how much of his reticence towards friendship of any kind was Shouta punishing himself for Oboro's death? How much was him fearing that the same would happen to Hizashi and he'd have to bury another friend?

It all seems to have contributed to their problems more than a lot, seeing as they're currently having a decent enough conversation and they're nowhere near each other's throats. Apparently it only took a couple decades of unprecedented traumatic experiences for Shouta to learn how to be a decent friend.

In his mind, he's almost a senior citizen. He doesn't have the energy or patience to be prideful any more. He wants to change the future, of course, but he also wants to enjoy the time he has with the people he cares about.

Even if it's selfish and makes him feel guilty in his core. It doesn't make him feel bad enough to walk away from the Midoriyas, which means it has nothing on how much he would never be able to turn Hizashi away.

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It's well into the afternoon when Shouta decides that, as pleasant as their time together has been, he needs time to himself. He says, "I have to get going. I'll see you at the same time next week."

Hizashi - blonde, exhausted, visibly hungover - beams. Sunny and absolutely delighted, he gives Shouta a double thumbs up and says, "Yep! I want to hear more about your little listener, and you better tell me how he does on that test of his, 'kay?"

"Whatever." He stands up and pushes the care package over to Hizashi's side of the table with his foot. "That's for you. From Inko. I told her you were fine, but she said if you're doing half as fine as I was when she met me, then that's not fine at all," he recites dutifully. "Izuku made a card or something too. I dunno. I didn't look."

"Oh wow. That's - "

"I'll see you next week." Shouta turns and walks away, ignoring Hizashi's cheerful well-wishes and goodbyes.

That night, after a crappy patrol, Shouta drags himself back to the apartment. Izuku's already asleep - as he should be, it's past four in the fucking morning - and Inko is just waking up to start her day. As she groggily starts the coffee maker, Shouta collapses onto the couch and pulls up the latest voicemail from Hizashi.

He's drunk, obviously, but not as plastered as he normally would be. The voicemail is a lot of him gushing over how nice it was to see him, and how much he missed Shouta, and, "I can't believe how nice the Midoriyas are, you deserve nice people and Missus Midoriya gave me? So many snacks? She's so nice and the little listener's card made me CRY okay I'm still about to cry - I can't WAIT for next week I miss you already thank you Shouta I think you're the absolute BEST."

And, well.

It's a step up from getting screamed at. It's better than last time.

He listens to it three more times, trying to understand how he could've changed so much in not much time at all. Without even *really* trying.

Shouta wonders what'll happen when he starts to put real effort in.

bleeding heart

Chapter Summary

> The world isn't divided into heroes and villains, even if that'd make Shouta's life a lot easier.

Chapter Notes

> thank u to the commenters that wished me a happy birthday, that was legit so sweet ;_; <3
>
> and thank u to everyone for reading and enjoying!!! last chapter was a really fun one for me and I really enjoyed bringing hizashi into the fold, so i'm glad it went over well with everyone <3 hopefully this one is received as well - it's a shorter one, and this is a chapter that probably doesn't seem like a huge deal at first glance, but it's a turning point for one of the plotlines i have planned even if aizawa won't see that anytime soon... insert not-so-subtle hint/foreshadowing here for the afo arc i have planned~
>
> thank you all again, and hope those of you in the same time zone as me are surviving the really crappy heat we've been getting the past few weeks. (i hate hot weather!!! so much!!!!!!!!)

“I thought you would dodge!” Izuku shrieks, running forward. “Mr. ‘Zawa are you okay I’m so sorry oh no oh NO YOU’RE BLEEDING - “

“It’s fine - kid, back off. It’s fine. I’ve been hit harder by kittens.”

“YOU’RE BLEEDING!”

“It’s fine.”

Unsurprisingly, Izuku bursts into tears. Shouta, nose bleeding and head ringing, can’t bring himself to hide the fond grin on his face.

Who would’ve thought that a few months into living with the Midoriyas, he’d find the copious number of tears endearing rather than annoying?

He reaches out and ruffles the kid’s hair, waits until his sobs have died down to some pathetic sniffles, then says, “That’s how much force you should be putting into the kick. You did good. Let’s do it again.”

“W-what if I hurt you?”

“That’s the point of this. You hurt people to distract them, and from there you either incapacitate them or get away from them. Right now, you’re tiny, so you’ll be aiming to get away from anyone who attacks you. When you’re older, I’ll show you how to incapacitate. Okay?”

Izuku nods very seriously, eyes already dry. As quick as he is to cry, he’s just as quick to pull himself together. Shouta is painfully fond of this strong kid, who feels things so strongly and works so hard even when everyone is trying to tear him down.

He swipes at the blood trickling out of his nose and says, “Okay. We’ll work on this for a little bit longer, then we’ll start heading home. Inko wants us to pick up takeout.”

“Can we get okonomiyaki?”

“Maybe. Show me you can kick that hard again and I’ll consider it.”

Izuku grins at him.

They, obviously, get okonomiyaki for dinner. Izuku insists on carrying it himself - “It’s training! If I can’t carry this, what kind of hero would I be?” and between that and his inability to go anywhere without rambling on and on about whatever quirk caught his eye that day, Shouta’s busy keeping him from running into traffic or a telephone pole.

“Do you have a favorite animal, Mr. ‘Zawa?”

“Cats. Rabbits are alright. I like cats a lot though.”

“Cats are great! Did you know that they domesticated themselves? Humans domesticated dogs ‘cause of hunting and stuff like that where dogs would help them, but humans never did that with cats! They just became friends with humans ‘cause they wanted to be. It’s also why there’s a bunch of different, specific dog breeds but cats are more muddled, ‘cause dogs were picked for being good hunters or trackers or whatever else people wanted them for, but cats weren’t ever selected like that. And cats only meow ‘cause they want to talk to us! “

“Makes sense. Cats are smart.”

“They are!”

“Did you know that when cats blink really slow, that’s their version of a smile?”

Izuku’s eyes go starry. He’s always unreasonably impressed any time Shouta tells him something that he doesn’t already know, even if it’s extremely basic information. “Really?”

“Mmhm. Like this.” Shouta waits until Izuku’s looking at him, then he very slowly and carefully blinks. “It means they trust you and care. Sort of. I think. I’m not a cat, so I guess I wouldn’t know for sure.”

Izuku says, “You’re so smart, Mr. ‘Zawa. I’m really glad you live with me and Mom now.”

“I told you ages ago that you can drop the ‘mister’, didn’t I?”

“But - !”

Their conversation is cut off by the loud, unmistakable noise of someone deciding to cause some property damage. The screeching of tires, people screaming in fear, and some lunatic shouting in rage - it’s basically the soundtrack for Shouta’s entire life.

Times like these, Shouta wonders how non-heroes really react to situations like this. He knows what civilians look like when these things happen - panicking, crying, running around, and generally being unhelpful to the situation - but he wonders what a normal civilian thinks of when a car gets flung in their direction. He’s been trained for longer than he can remember to keep calm and assess the situation, and he doesn’t remember what it’s like to be genuinely worried about the morons that throw their weight and quirks around. Is their panic exacerbated by the fact that they don’t know how much worse it could be?

Would they panic the same if Shigaraki was here?

If Izuku wasn’t seven, he might’ve asked him. He might’ve tried to explain a nightmare scenario where a godlike man destroys everything in his path and steals quirks like they’re candy in the hands of children, where standing near him was enough to make most pros tremble. To an untrained civilian who can’t protect themselves against a mediocre strength enhancing quirk, is there that much of a difference between that and Shigaraki’s power? Either could kill them just as easily. Deku would appreciate the thought exercise, and Izuku’s sharp as a tack. While he wouldn’t be able to dig in the way Deku could, Shouta finds himself curious what this young version of his ally

would have to say about the matter.

Izuku, though, *is* seven.

He's seven, visibly afraid, and Shouta is responsible for him.

Izuku, to his credit, immediately clutches onto Shouta's hand. It's a better response than Shouta could've hoped for when a child is faced with panicked civilians and a loud disturbance. Him freezing up or running away (who's he kidding - his problem child would run towards danger, not away) would've been a pain.

Not that there's much danger, really. From what Shouta can see, the person causing mayhem is more brawn than brains. His path of destruction is haphazard and doesn't seem to have a goal in mind.

Bulging muscles, taller than a house, and stepping on anything he wants as he runs away from the cops - it looks like a typical situation that didn't have to be as messy as it's ended up being. A guy with a large, intimidating mutation quirk got startled and started wrecking havoc. Likely, the poor bastard was shoplifting or smoking something he shouldn't, the cops spooked him, and he panicked. In the age of quirks, this is much more detrimental of an offense than it needs to be - especially when the panicking person is large and powerful, and cops aren't known for their stellar de-escalation skills.

There are issues in the hero community and how much power heroes are given, but at least they're public figures that will be raked over the coals if they step out of line. Daylight heroes are obnoxious and flashy, but for their image, they have to at the absolute minimum make a token attempt at talking the instigator down. Cops, on the other hand, get away with a lot more brutality and prejudice. They instigate more crises than they solve. Shouta isn't a fan of either, but he would prefer to work with other heroes than the police any day of the week.

This disconnect between the two intertwined entities can, and in Shouta's case does, lead to tension between heroes and the police. The more popular heroes get fawned over and sucked up to, the less popular ones get disrespected and brushed off as dumb celebrities, and the unknown ones (like Shouta) are looked at as outsiders. Underground heroes are treated the same as federal agents or cops from other jurisdictions - unwanted, irritating, and a danger to the way they run their shop.

All of this is to say: Shouta has very little respect for most cops. He's

had too many bad experiences with them not trusting his judgment and doing their damnedest to make his already difficult job more of a pain. This isn't getting into the fact that he doesn't trust them to do their jobs correctly if he isn't breathing over their shoulders.

As Shouta ushers Izuku away from the chase that's rapidly getting closer, he tries not to look at the obvious panic on the poor guy's face. If he was more well-established, if he wasn't with Izuku, if his quirk worked on mutations - he might have intervened.

Here, though, there's little he can do.

"The cops have it handled. Let's head home." He tugs Izuku away and in the opposite direction. "We're alright."

"I don't understand," Izuku says. His voice is shaking a little, but his grip on Shouta's hand is firm without any sense of desperation or fear.

"Hm?"

"The man running. I don't understand. He's a villain?" Izuku shakes his head. "He looks really afraid."

Shouta's eyes close. He says, without opening them, "The world isn't divided into heroes and villains. Not the way those shows you like watching try to say. Sometimes, someone causing a problem is just a person in a bad position. Just because someone is getting arrested doesn't mean they're a villain, or even a bad person."

When he opens his eyes, Izuku's looking up at him with a worried frown. "Is he going to be okay?"

"Sure. Probably."

"Probably?"

Shouta says, "He's causing a lot of damage. Cops are trained to end situations like this as quickly as possible. Even if that means hurting him."

Izuku's frown deepens. "That's not right."

Shouta doesn't agree or disagree. This is a conversation that would be more at home in a college discussion course than on a walk home with a child. There's too much nuance for a child to understand.

When Shouta doesn't answer, Izuku says persistently, "Mr. 'Zawa, the whole point of heroes and police officers and stuff is to help people. They're not helping that man if they keep scaring him."

He doesn't say anything.

Again, there's a lot of nuance that a kid can't get. Is it really the cops' job to help people, or is it to keep the peace as a whole? Is it really a hero's job to help individuals, or are they meant to act as symbols for the general populace to put their faith in?

"Mr. 'Zawa?"

Shouta sighs.

Loud, long, and emphatically, he sighs. Rolls his neck, adjusts his capture weapon, and finally kneels down next to Izuku.

"Can I trust you to stay here and not wander off?"

Izuku levels him with a suspicious look, as if Shouta would just abandon him for no good reason. To whoever put that look on his face, Shouta would like to argue there's no *good* reason to abandon this kid (or any kid, for that matter). He asks, with that same level of suspicion, "Why?"

"As is becoming startlingly frequent, a child is acting as my conscience. I'm going to go check on that man. As long as you agree to stay here and scream if anyone tries to touch you. Got me?"

Izuku nods hard enough that his hair flops into his eyes. "Yessir!"

"I mean it. Don't talk to strangers. Stand here, stay away from the fight, and wait for me to finish up."

He nods again. "Yes Mr. 'Zawa!"

Damn this kid. Damn Shouta's bleeding fucking heart.

compared to izuku's dad, aizawa is a great role model (even if he gets injured semi-frequently)

Chapter Summary

Hisashi Midoriya (?) is discussed.

Chapter Notes

woo~ this chapter is a decent amount of backstory for inko!!! i love her. this chapter's a little heavy and discusses an off-screen abusive relationship - be warned if that's a trigger for you!! if you want to skip it, stop reading when inko goes into "storyteller" mode. ("When they're both settled, she takes a deep breath and begins.") there's nothing explicit, but inko describes an old relationship that was Not Good

thank you all for reading and for the kind comments!!! you've made writing this a really enjoyable and rewarding process, and i hope i can continue to keep your attention <3 happy friday!

Inko is less than pleased to see Shouta limping home. Even Izuku's starry-eyed wonder and declarations of, "Mr. 'Zawa is the BEST hero ever and he's my favorite he's so NICE Mama even the police man agreed with me when I said so - " do little to appease her visible irritation.

Shouta doesn't remember a police officer talking to Izuku, but he also took a pretty hard hit to his head so it's entirely possible he just doesn't remember. Nice of him to agree with Izuku, though.

Inko not-so-gently shoves Shouta into her recliner and says, "Izuku, can you get the first-aid kit for me? It should be under the bathroom sink."

Izuku chirps, "'Kay!" and runs off.

Inko stares down at Shouta, who blinks placidly.

"You can't keep doing this," she says firmly. "If not for your own health, then for Izuku."

Shouta blinks again.

“Injuring yourself. Getting hurt. Throwing yourself into danger like your life doesn’t matter.” She waves a hand, lips curling into a scowl that looks out of place on her face. “It’s not acceptable.”

“What?”

Shouta’s a hero. Heroes get injured sometimes. It’s part of the job. He’s actually pretty good about not getting himself too hurt in comparison to other pros - a bruise here or there, grazes from knives, maybe a dislocated shoulder or two.

On top of that, Shouta’s a teacher. He knows the importance of prioritizing a hero’s physical and mental health due to how many morons he’s had to beat the lesson into. Deku was one of many who, due to being born without any sense of concern for himself, had to learn self-preservation in Shouta’s classroom. Shouta’s never been one to go into situations he knows he can’t win - unless his students or children were at risk, but that’s understandable. It’s a teacher’s responsibility to protect their charges.

“You keep coming back from your patrols beat to Hell! And now you’re coming back from being with *Izuku* beat even worse than usual!” her voice is quiet, and she keeps looking towards the doorway waiting for Izuku to return. “You can’t keep doing that. You have to start worrying about your own safety, Shouta.”

“I’m not a reckless idiot,” he says bluntly. “I’m a hero. Sometimes we get bruised. It’s not a big deal.”

“You came home last week with a sprained wrist. The week before that, a concussion and dislocated shoulder. You’re limping now, obviously, but you haven’t been able to put all of your weight on your left foot for at least a month. You passed out the other day when you came home - “

“That was just dehydration,” Shouta protests mildly. Part of him is wondering if her archive of his injuries is right - he doesn’t remember half of them.

His patrols and assignments have been going smoother than they used to, given the experience he’s accumulated since the last time around. With those going easily enough, his free time can be used for research and information gathering, trying to find out if the League is even around yet or not. There’s whispers of “Sensei” and his unhinged pet child that destroys anything it touches, but nothing concrete yet that Shouta can act on.

When he hits dead-ends on the League, he shifts to tracking down those involved with Overhaul's operation. Plenty of them were yakuza or people already involved in stupid illegal crap, so it's easy enough to get them behind bars. The other, more slippery ones, he keeps an eye on them to make sure he'll be able to handle them when they inevitably make a mistake and implicate themselves.

Kai Chisaki won't ever lay a hand on Eri if Shouta has anything to say about it.

(He has a lot of emotions about the fact that, if he does his job well, he might never meet Eri. The girl he more or less raised as his own won't need him, she won't put her tiny hand in his own when they cross the street, she won't sit with him on the couch watching cartoons at three in the morning because neither of them can sleep -

But she'll be able to smile naturally, as opposed to having to re-learn a basic concept like *happiness.* She'll be able to learn how to use her quirk without fearing it so intensely. She'll be free in a way that she never was the first time around.

And, most of all, Eri will live.

In the end, Shouta's own feelings about the situation don't matter. Eri will live and have a chance at a normal childhood, and Shouta will ensure that Kai Chisaki rots in Hell long before he can lay a hand on her.)

With how much he has on his plate, it shouldn't surprise Shouta that he didn't notice a number of his injuries - or the fact that he was receiving them in the first place. He's still weirdly startled that Inko had noticed when he hadn't, though.

"Shouta," Inko says, her face strangely pained. "Passing out isn't 'just' anything. You need to take care of yourself. Again, if not for you, then for Izuku." At Shouta's questioning look, she sighs and runs a hand through her hair. "He idolizes you, Shouta. Anything you do, he's going to imitate. It's already hard enough when he sees heroes getting injured on TV and thinks that's comparable to him getting injured at school - I can't imagine how he'll start justifying things to himself if he has a first hand example of someone being careless in front of him. He tries so hard to be tough, and if you're brushing off injuries like this..."

Oh.

“I understand,” Shouta says quietly. “I apologize. I’m unused to someone looking to me as a role model.”

“Just promise me that you’ll be more careful,” she pleads. “I know that sometimes you’re going to get hurt, but the stuff you can stop - Please.”

“Yes. I’ll do what I can, Inko.”

In an exhaled breath, all tension leaves her body.

Just like that, he’s been forgiven. Unlike Recovery Girl, who grumbles and complains at him even when he is genuinely remorseful, Inko smiles at him, as warm as ever, and says, “That’s all I want. And Izuku, you can stop pretending that you weren’t trying to eavesdrop!”

A muffled, “Eep!” comes from the hallway. Her and Shouta share a wry grin.

“Come on, let’s get Shouta patched up and then we can finally eat. What did you two work on today while training?”

The okonomiyaki went cold ages ago, but it’s easy enough to heat the food up on the stove and settle in for the meal. Izuku’s clearly exhausted, seeing as his motor mouth is completely focused on food for once. His eyes are drooping and he keeps falling forward before jerking back up, forcing himself to stay awake.

Shouta isn’t far behind. He’s not particularly hungry and would rather be catching up on sleep, but he skipped breakfast and Inko’ll be pissed if he skips two meals. He forces himself to finish what’s on his plate and drinks a full cup of water at Inko’s pointed look.

Inko finishes up her own food, then pokes Izuku’s forehead. He blearily looks up at her and says, “Huh?”

“Are you finished packing? We’ll be moving over to the new apartment tomorrow. Mrs. Watanabe has a new tenant who’ll be moving here for the next rent cycle, so we need to have everything out as soon as possible.”

“Mmhm. Just my bathroom stuff is left since I haven’t showered yet.”

“You want to do that before you pass out?” Shouta asks dryly. “You’re dead on your feet.”

“Today was long!” he whines, scrubbing at his eyes. “And I still have to write down your fight in my notebook! And everything you taught me today!”

“You need to go to bed so you don’t pass out when we start moving tomorrow.”

“He’s right baby,” Inko agrees, ruffling his hair lightly. “You can write everything down tomorrow. Okay?”

Clearly, Izuku isn’t happy with that, but he sighs dramatically and nods. His feet drag as he disappears into the bathroom. Even now that they’ve been training for a few months, the sight of an exhausted problem child is strange for Shouta to see. He’s normally so upbeat and energetic, talking a mile a minute and fidgeting whenever he can’t talk.

After a full day of school followed by training, all of that energy seems to have been sapped out of him. Include a surprise altercation with a panicked shoplifter (as Shouta had predicted, of course) and the cops - it’s no wonder the kid’s ready to collapse.

Shouta kind of wants to collapse too. If he didn’t need to talk to Inko, he’d go to bed even though it’s barely past eight.

The two of them clean up the table and head into the kitchen to run through the normal nighttime chores - throwing out the takeout containers, wiping the counters down, checking the fridge and cupboards for anything they’ll need to pick up the next day, checking through the mail for any bills or notices they need to handle. It’s one of many domestic rituals that still feels foreign for him to participate in.

Once they’ve completed everything, Shouta doesn’t let himself procrastinate any longer than he already has. He says, “I’ve been trying to find out a delicate way to ask this for awhile now, but you know I’m pretty bad at being delicate. So I’m just going to ask and you can punch me if you want.”

Inko raises an eyebrow. She wipes her hands on the dish towel and tosses it over her shoulder before leaning against the counter and waiting expectantly. “Okay…?”

“What’s the situation with Izuku’s father?” Inko’s startled intake of breath is more of a hiss than anything else. Shouta pushes through anyway. “He’s made a few comments about him that I’m concerned

about. You don't have to go into detail if you don't want to, but I should probably at least know who he is and if he's allowed to see Izuku or not."

"He's not," Inko says quickly. "Or, at least, not alone."

"Can I know why?"

Inko Midoriya is a kind, gentle woman. She has a spine of steel, but it's surrounded by softness. It's something Shouta admires about her - the ability to be so unwavering in her convictions but still soft and optimistic and hopeful in a way that Shouta's never been able to be. She's a chubby, hard-working mother who keeps them afloat while still loving her child more than anything else.

There are times where that softness disappears, though, to be replaced by a haunted demeanor. Her shoulders tense and she becomes a wary, defensive rock that won't be swayed by anything short of a hurricane. It's something that tells Shouta that she's lived through more than he would've expected given her general sensitivity.

The way she hunches over and tries to make herself look smaller tells Shouta that Izuku's father played some role in making her that way.

"Can you promise me that you won't judge me too harshly?" she asks softly. "This isn't something I'm proud of. My relationship with Hisashi is something that, if I hadn't gotten Izuku from it, I would regret the most in my life."

"Of course I won't. What room do I have to judge you?" Shouta waves at himself. "I'm a grown man who is relying on you to keep a roof over my head. I spend more time messing around with a seven-year-old than around people my age."

She gives him a weak smile. "Well. That's all fairly harmless, though."

"And Hisashi isn't?"

The smile drops immediately.

"Hisashi - it's complicated. He's dangerous, but not - I mean, it's." She sighs heavily and takes a seat at the dining room table, motioning for Shouta to follow. He takes the seat next to her, rather than across from her. Something in him says she'll appreciate the comfort of his closeness, though it feels arrogant to assume that.

When they're both settled, she takes a deep breath and begins.

"We weren't married. I told people that we were so Izuku wouldn't have to deal with the stigma that comes with a single, unmarried mom, but. We weren't. It's a small comfort. He's not even listed on Izuku's birth certificate - Izuku has no legal ties to Hisashi." She covers her eyes with a hand and visibly bites back a sob. "Thank God for that. I don't know if he wanted it that way for Izuku's safety or his own, but thank God there's no paper trail to link him to us. I don't know what that would've done for Izuku, growing up with whatever Hisashi was involved in looming overhead.

"He. I mean, we barely had a relationship. It was mostly sex. I didn't know much about him. It was something comfortable - casual. I didn't want a relationship while I was in school, and he said he was too busy with work for anything traditional. Our chemistry was purely physical."

Looking at soft, sweet Inko - that's really hard for Shouta to wrap his head around. She seems like the kind of woman who would want roses and chocolates, midnight walks on the beach - not some sort of fuck-buddy relationship.

He's not judging, but he'll admit he's surprised. It had never occurred to him that Izuku, beacon of hope and sunshine and affection, was a byproduct of anything other than two young adults deliriously in love.

"So, when I got pregnant, I didn't really expect much. I told him because I thought it was only fair, but I also told him that I didn't expect - or even want, really - him to be involved." She presses a hand against her stomach and gives a strange smile. "He was absolutely delighted. Like I'd never seen before. I knew he enjoyed our time together since he never suggested we stop seeing each other, but I wasn't expecting the way he responded. He dragged me to a doctor to get a more conclusive test than a home one, and when that came back positive too, he was over the moon.

"Suddenly, I was being smothered in affection and items and money. Anything I needed or wanted was provided for. He moved me out of my crappy college apartment into a house. He didn't stay with me or anything, so it wasn't his. He just. Got me a house. And everything I wanted. The best and most discreet doctors there were. Clothes, jewelry, baby clothes, baby toys - I'm pretty sure he bribed one of my professors to give me extensions when I needed them."

“That’s. Weird.”

Inko laughs. “I know. It was bizarre. But I was young and pregnant and as much as I wanted Izuku, I was scared. And there was something comforting about having someone take care of things like that for me. Knowing that I could study without worrying about money is probably the only reason I was able to graduate.” She makes a face and says, “God, it sounds like I’m talking about a parent rather than an ex. That’s pretty much how he started treating me - like I was a precious child that he had to protect.”

“Ick.”

“If it makes you feel any better, Izuku’s conception was the last time we had sex.”

“That is really weird for me to think about and I’d like it if you stopped.”

She smirks, just a little. “If people looked at the two of us, they’d think I was the prude and I’d have fun knowing they’re wrong.”

“Please.”

She laughs again. “You’re very cute sometimes, Shouta.”

“Inko.”

Her mirth leaves as quickly as it appeared. “But, anyway - I’m not proud that I accepted all of this, even though Hisashi was clearly involved with… things. A normal businessman can’t afford everything he was giving me. A normal businessman can’t be available at any hour of the day if I called and said I needed something. There was obviously something going on behind the scenes, but I just.” She shrugs helplessly. “I didn’t want to know. So I didn’t ask or think about it much. I just accepted the situation I was in, and I prepared for Izuku.

“When he was born, Hisashi didn’t stop smiling. He didn’t leave Izuku’s side for ages. And, for a little while, we were okay. An odd family, but things were fine. Hisashi and I co-parented, to some extent, with Hisashi normally letting my desires take precedent. He was happy to spoil Izuku and teach him, leaving me to set the daily schedule and decide on how to discipline when necessary.

“Something changed once Izuku started walking.” She shudders. “I

don't know what. I never really knew Hisashi - he was so secretive. I knew he was involved in something illegal - I assumed he was, at least. I didn't even know for sure what his last name was. He just - It was like once Izuku was mobile, Hisashi suddenly felt insecure. Maybe there was something else going on, but that's the only connection I ever figured out. Izuku started walking, and Hisashi became strange. He hated if I left the house with Izuku - even taking him to the park was a problem. He'd get so mad - " her voice breaks.

"You don't have to - "

"Shut up or I won't ever finish this," she says quickly. "You should know - I want you to know. It's just. Hard. Okay?"

Shouta nods.

"So. It started getting scary. He'd have coworkers - he called them coworkers, but I don't know who they were and I don't know where they came from - stay with us when he had to be anywhere. He made it harder and harder for me to leave the house by taking my keys or breaking the car. When I couldn't get a job because he kept sabotaging all of my interviews, I confronted him about it. He said that it's his job to protect his family and he can't do that if he doesn't know where we are.

"I told him that if he kept smothering me and Izuku, that I'd take him and run." She shuts her eyes tightly. "He. Didn't like that. He hit me. And Izuku was - what, three? Three or four. Before we found out that Izuku was quirkless and not just a late bloomer. But Izuku's always been so smart, even that young, so he knew that something was wrong. He screamed and had a tantrum at Hisashi when I started crying and then… Then Hisashi hit him too."

"Inko - "

"And the sick thing is - I'm almost glad that he hit Izuku. Because when Izuku stopped crying and held his little face in his hand, shocked that his beloved Papa would do that, Hisashi looked absolutely horrified. Hitting me - if he had just hit me, we might still be there. He cared for his *child's mother* , not for me. But Izuku? His precious son?" She shakes her head and sighs. "That - he couldn't handle that. He disappeared. The next day, there were moving trucks that took us to another house.

"He called us a week later and apologized. Said that he clearly was not fit to be a parent, but he would do whatever he could to ensure we

lived a comfortable, safe life. I - Shouta, I was afraid. So I said, 'It's okay, it's fine. Thank you.'" She presses a hand against her stomach and laughs. "I thanked him. For the pretty cage he was keeping us in."

"What else could you do?"

She shrugs helplessly. "I don't know. But, from there, he'd call every week to talk to Izuku. They'd talk for hours if they could. He'd send money and things, but we never saw him in person or even in a video call again.

"I saved up the money that he would send, and once I got a job, I used that money to move us here. He upped his calls to twice a week once we moved but he didn't do anything about us leaving. The house had been torn down, last I checked.

"When Izuku turned six, he stopped calling for about six months. And then suddenly he was calling almost daily. I don't know why. He was constantly asking about why Izuku liked heroes so much, trying to convince him that heroes are a scam. He kept trying to tell a child that he can't trust heroes, that they're all trash and - well, a lot more. Izuku was getting upset, and I asked him to stop. He said no and went on a fanatical rant that I still don't know what to make of.

"So I changed our number. He found it - which again leads me to believe that he's involved in something not-so-great - but he backed off, finally. I guess it was enough of a message that if he pushed too far, I'd make sure Izuku wouldn't talk to him. Now he only calls on holidays."

Inko's breathing is somewhat ragged as her story ends. Her eyes are teary.

Shouta, as an underground hero, has seen his fair share of domestic abuse cases. He's seen and heard of some horrific things, and while Inko's is far from the worst situation he's heard of - it horrifies him in a way that he can't put into words just yet. It sounds like a terrible psychological horror, to be trapped and then released on one man's whims. To not know anything about a captor that was, on the surface, taking such loving care of his family. To know that the threat of violence was looming and only receive glimpses of it, in strained moments. To never know how powerful this man was and if that power could be used to track them down no matter what she did.

"This is why you were quick to let me stay," Shouta says quietly. "You

said that you felt safer knowing that a hero was staying with you."

"I do feel safer," she admits. "I let you stay because you needed it and because I had a feeling you'd be good for us, but. I told you it was selfish. Having you here, for if Hisashi ever decided to come back and take Izuku - that's my biggest fear. He's generally benign and clearly would never hurt him, but I'm so afraid that one day I'll wake up and Izuku will be gone. Or we'll both be trapped again."

"You won't be," Shouta says firmly. "Like I'd let some creep bother you or Izuku. I won't let that happen."

Inko finally fully breaks into sobs. Her shoulders tremble and she cries, saying, "I-I know, I know. You're so. You're s-so good, Shouta, thank you. Thank you, thank - "

"Stop that," he scolds. He steps forward and does his best to hug her. He's never been great at it, but she melts into his arms and buries her head into his shoulder. "Come on. You're the one who said we're family. I'd be a pretty piss poor hero if I let some cruddy mobster harm my precious people."

Inko cries harder and clutches at him. Shouta settles in for a long round of soothing - a skill he's had to pick up since joining the Midoriya brood.

5-4-3-2-1

Chapter Summary

Moving is stressful.

Chapter Notes

all of you ;_; ngl i was chomping at the bit for the lowkey dad-for-one reveal and i'm glad that you guys didn't seem to mind the way in which i did it. this story's going to have plenty more moments like that - where we know what's going on, but aizawa doesn't - and this was the first Big One that popped up, so i was kinda nervous about how it'd come across. obviously my tags kinda gave it away, but it seemed like it was obvious enough for you guys to pick up on while still being understandable why aizawa didn't pick up on it - which i am *extremely* grateful for!!!!

thank you guys for reading <3 and while i don't have the emotional capacity to respond to comments individually, i do want you to know that i read all of them and cherish them, and when i see recurring names in my inbox it makes my entire *week* <3 i appreciate your enthusiasm so much!!!! i really hope i can keep making this something worthwhile for you all to enjoy.

for this chapter, **a small trigger warning** - tw: for a panic attack. it's not described super in depth and we're mostly looking at the "let's comfort them!!!" part of a panic attack, but if you would like to skip it, stop reading at "He can see that they are" and you can pick up again at "That last one is easily fixed by gulping down the water in hand."

Moving is a pain. Shouta had no idea how annoying it would be to move boxes from one end of the building's hallway over to the other side.

Izuku insists on moving his things himself, which would be cute if he wasn't constantly in the way. He can't lift any of the boxes he packed, so he pushes them across the floor slowly. They're almost as big as him and he has to use his entire body to move the damn things. When Shouta finishes moving everything except Izuku's crap, the kid's just over halfway through.

“Why don’t you help your mom unpack?” Shouta asks desperately. “I can get the rest. You can start hanging up your five hundred posters and getting your room sorted out.”

“I have to get strong!” Izuku insists. His face is red as he struggles to push a box full of his clothes. “It’s training!”

“You’re seven and there’s limits to what your tiny child body can do. You’re causing me physical pain to watch you struggle with this.”

“Mr. ‘Zawa, I can do it!”

This kid.

Shouta does his best to step delicately over him and not crush any small fingers or toes. Inko just laughs at him from their new living room where she’s rearranging the furniture. He doesn’t think the way the couch is positioned is *that* big of a deal, but Inko has already moved and twisted and moved the damn thing over and over, clearly unable to decide what the perfect arrangement is, and Shouta doesn’t need to get involved with whatever neuroticism is making her hyperfocus on the matter.

The kitchen is mostly sorted out since each apartment comes with most of the same appliances. Inko’s room - a fairly spartan area, with little more than a bed, nightstand, and picture of her and Izuku - took all of twenty minutes to get sorted. Shouta dropped his sleeping bag, duffel of clothes, and small shopping bag of things he’s accumulated since living with the Midoriyas into the room Inko told him was his.

Izuku’s room is the only one that is empty save for boxes.

“Izuku, you’re being illogical. Just let me help.”

“I can do it!” he insists again. “Mom, tell Mr. ‘Zawa I can do it!”

Inko looks up from where she’s pushing the couch, pushes hair out of her face, and grins at Shouta. “He can do it, Shouta. Leave him be. If you want something to do, you can head to the grocery store and pick up what we’ll need for the week.”

Shouta eyes Izuku whose trajectory is about to send him and his box straight into the wall. Inko shrugs, a “What can ya do? Kids, amiright?” expression on her face. He sighs.

“What am I getting?”

And so, armed with a list of kitchen essentials and a handful of cash, he heads to the local store.

It's a bit of a walk, which is probably why Inko sent him. She's scarily good at recognizing when Shouta's overwhelmed by human interaction, considering her quirk isn't an empathic one. It'll likely be easier now that he has his own room to retreat to when the people around him aren't perfectly acquiescing to or responding in the way he thinks they should be.

Until the move is finished, though, a walk and an easy errand are a good enough way for him to get some space.

Times like these, he wonders if there's more he could be doing. If he was really the best choice for trying to save the entire goddamn world from someone who makes All Might look like an injured puppy. Here he is, deciding between soft and extra soft toilet paper, when, for all he knows, Shigaraki is already on his way to becoming the evil overlord he'll be if Shouta can't stop him.

Not that there was much of a choice left towards the end, but Shouta would rather not think about why he, of all people, ended up here. If he had a choice in the matter, he would've sent Hizashi or Deku or - even though it makes him want to grind his teeth and punch a wall to rely on the buffoon - All Might, all of whom had a lot more influence than he ever did.

His job would be a lot easier if he was half as popular as All Might. He'd have access to a lot more information, a lot more resources, and a lot more "no I don't have to explain myself, I'm a big tough hero who always does what's best, just trust me" to throw around.

That's never been his style, though, and he wouldn't succeed as a spotlight hero even if he tried. He doesn't have the temperament.

Which is why literally anyone other than him should be here instead.

"But no," he grumbles to himself, grabbing a box of the gummies he and Izuku like to share when they're working on his homework. "Everyone had to go and get themselves killed like fucking morons and leave me to clean up the mess. Like fucking always."

Checking out doesn't take too long since they were able to keep most of the groceries they had from the old apartment. There were random items that they hadn't bothered to stock back up on since they would be moving, but not enough that Shouta feels weighed down by bags.

As he's deciding if the gummies and his jelly pouches can fit into one bag or if he'll have to use a second one, his phone starts buzzing. Caller ID says it's Inko, so he picks up immediately.

"Yeah?"

"Hi Shouta - Izuku, stop that - are you still at the store?"

"Yeah. I'm checking out now."

"Oh, I was hoping to catch you before that. Is it too much of a bother for you to grab some acetaminophen and a new first-aid kit? We're running low on just about everything now - "

Shouta stares ahead at nothing. His phone feels slick in his suddenly sweaty hand. "Is Izuku okay? What happened?"

She quickly says, "He's fine! We're both fine, sorry, I should've started with that. I'll explain when you get home, but we're both fine."

"I just stocked the kit last week, how are things already empty? Is someone listening? If someone's listening start talking about Izuku's last math test - "

"We're fine," she says more firmly. "Neither of us is hurt. There's no one listening. There's no rush. Finish up and come home, but you don't need to worry. I'm sorry for startling you."

He swallows. "Okay. I'll be back soon."

"Great! I was thinking I'd make hamburger steak tonight since we still have beef, does that sound good?"

"Sure. Whatever is fine."

He hangs up. Tries and fails to loosen the grip he has on his phone.

The aisles blur together as he rushes to get what Inko asked for. He doesn't see exactly what he grabs, but he grabs a few of everything and then some extra to be safe. His hands are steady even as he can hear his heartbeat thumping at an uncomfortably fast clip.

They're fine. Inko said they were fine. Izuku's fine. He gnaws on the inside of his cheek to stop from screaming at the other customers in his way.

Checking out is a blur. The walk home - if him sprinting and pushing

past any pedestrians could even be called a walk - is a blur. His phone is silent but he doesn't put it back in his pocket.

They'll expect him to come in through the front door. Anyone would go through the door when Inko said they were fine, and she said they were fine so they're almost definitely fine but just in case they're not the front door would be the stupidest place for him to enter through and Shouta's a lot of things but he's not stupid.

Figuring out which window leads to their new apartment is easy. Opening it is easy too - and they'll have to discuss getting better locks, they might be on the third floor but anyone and their mother has a quirk that can get them up a few floors easily enough which means safely locked windows is a necessity. Crawling in silently even with his cargo is easiest of all, because what kind of underground hero would he be if he couldn't?

He wouldn't have made it this far if he couldn't. His stealth is the only real advantage he had over the others that got killed.

Shouta can see the back of Inko's head from the kitchen. Izuku is sitting in Inko's blue recliner, chattering away.

Someone else is lying on the couch.

His capture weapon isn't as advanced as the one he had in the future - Hatsume's upgrades aren't technologically feasible in this era quite yet and he doesn't think anyone except for her would be able to make them anyway - but it's second nature to use it to grab both Midoriyas and yank them behind him.

"Mr. 'Zawa!" Izuku immediately yells. "That's so cool I didn't know your scarf could do that how much can it lift do you use it to catch bad guys did you get ice cream can you hold ice cream with your scarf so it doesn't melt onto your hands what about - "

"Shouta, you gave me a heart attack! What's this about?"

"Zip it," he hisses, pressing them towards the window. "Inko, take Izuku and call the cops. I'll handle this."

"Handle… what, exactly?"

He jerks his head at the couch, where the intruder still is. "Tell them Eraserhead - "

“Oh! Shouta, it’s okay honey, that’s not - “

“I am NOT letting Shigaraki get his hands on you so GO - “

Inko’s hands reach out and grab his face, forcing him to look at her. He freezes at the look on her face.

“Shouta,” she says tenderly, hands warm against his cheeks. Her green eyes are dry for once. “It’s okay. We’re not in danger. We’re safe. I promise, honey, we’re all okay.”

His throat clicks as he swallows. “There’s. On the couch.”

“I know. A young woman was hurt outside, so Izuku and I brought her up here to patch her up. That’s all.”

“The. I don’t.”

“It’s okay. We’re safe. You’ve kept us safe. See?” She smiles. “Izuku, you’re okay, right?”

Izuku nods and smiles too. “It’s okay Mr. ‘Zawa. Why?” Puffing up his cheeks and thrusting his chest out as much as he can when he’s wrapped up like a tiny green burrito, he finishes with, “‘Cause we’re here!”

Shouta drops them. He drops the groceries next. And, last but most definitely least, he drops himself and collapses to his knees.

They’re fine.

He can see that they are.

“Oh dear. Izuku, baby, can you go get Mr. Aizawa a cup of water please?”

“Mmhm.”

So why is he still afraid?

“Do you want to breathe with me, Shouta? I know all the breathing techniques say to breathe for four counts, but I like odd numbers better. Let’s do five, okay? In, two, three, four, five - go ahead and hold that. Three, four, five. Out, two, three, four, five. Let’s go again. In, two, three, four, five - hold, two, three, four, five - out, two, three, four, five. You’re doing great, honey. Let’s keep going. In, two, three, four, five - “

After an innumerable amount of repetitions, a small hand holds out a red cup and carefully deposits it into Shouta's hand. Then a light weight appears on his shoulder - he has enough presence of mind to note that it's a light yellow blanket that he doesn't remember seeing before - and Izuku's voice joins in with Inko's. Somehow, Izuku ends up tucked against Shouta's side and burrows in close.

He can see the red cup in his hands. The yellow blanket. Inko's calm face, gently smiling. Izuku's freckled cheeks that puff up with every exaggerated breath he's taking. His own trembling hands.

The cup is cool in his hands. The blanket is soft. Beneath him, the carpet is cheap and scratchy. There's a breeze coming in from the window.

He can hear Inko's counting. Izuku's impatient wiggling. The TV droning in the background, saying something about a recent villain apprehension.

The apartment smells like a smoker once lived here. Izuku's hair smells like the green apple-scented All Might shampoo he insists on picking out every time they go shopping.

He can taste blood in his mouth from where he bit into his cheek earlier.

That last one is easily fixed by gulping down the water in hand. He finishes the entire cup in three swallows, and in that time, Inko and Izuku quiet down.

"Sorry about that."

His voice is hoarser than he thought it would be. He wishes he had more water.

Inko shakes her head. "It's not a problem at all. I'm sorry that we worried you. I should've let you know there was someone here."

"No, stop. Fuck. I - It's your home. You shouldn't have to. It's fine. This is just me being - "

"It's your home too," Inko insists. "You deserve to feel safe here. I should've told you why we needed the extra supplies, but I didn't want to hold you up since you were checking out in case there were people behind you. I thought it was okay for it to wait until you got back. I really didn't mean to worry you."

“You told me you were fine. I should’ve. I don’t know. Fuck.”

They sit in silence for a few seconds. Izuku is the only one not motionless, fidgeting in place and looking up at Shouta then looking down at his feet.

“What, Izuku?”

Izuku glances over at his mom, then glances up at Shouta again, then blurts out, “Do you like the blanket ‘cause Mom let me pick it out for you and it was s’posed to be for your birthday but it looked like you needed it now and I remembered that you liked cats and your sleeping bag’s yellow but you said you liked blue flavor jelly so maybe you would’ve liked the blue one better but anyway do you like it?”

Shouta pulls part of the blanket around for him to look at more closely. It’s a pale yellow and covered in pink paw-prints. In between the paw-prints are small gray cats in various poses - some curled up sleeping, others batting at balls of yarn, some sprawled out and waving a paw forward.

It’s sickeningly cute.

He tugs it tighter around him and pats Izuku’s head with a hand that only trembles a little bit. “It’s great. Thank you.”

Izuku beams back.

“Well!” Inko claps her hands together. “Shouta, do you want to lie down for a bit before dinner? A nap would probably do you some good.”

“No, I can help with dinner. Or at least put the groceries away.”

From the couch, there’s the sound of movement. A familiar face peeks up past the back of the couch and grins widely at them.

Nemuri Kayama, pro-hero Midnight, looks as mischievous ever. Her face and neck are covered in bruises, and when she lifts up a finger to cutely emphasize one of her dimples, her wrist has been wrapped with a compression bandage.

She says, “Who would’ve guessed that Shouta Aizawa, of all people, would’ve gone domestic so soon? It’s bringing a tear to my eye.”

Shouta stands up and walks away. “Never mind. I’m taking that nap.

I'm not dealing with this right now."

"You're so MEAN, Shouta!"

"Mr. 'Zawa isn't mean! Take it back!"

sometimes friendship is ignoring every elephant that's ever entered a room

Chapter Summary

Nemuri has dinner with the Midoriya crew.

Chapter Notes

me: this is going to be a light and fluffy fic and it'll be generally soft!!!
also me: hm but it's just not Realistic for aizawa to not have SOME depression and anxiety and trauma, and i can't just NOT give nemuri a tragic backstory.....

what's the current tiktok trend that's like. "i lost the plot of the story what the heck happened?" b/c that's p much where this story is going. i'm gonna have to update the tags ;_;

thank you all for reading and being so nice <3 i'm also SO delighted that you guys seemed to like the blanket izuku gave shouta b/c i agonized over whether that was Too Cheesy or not when debating if i would include that part. it seems like i made the right choice~

additionally!!! i'm going to try to be a little more active on tumblr again - my username for this fic is the same as my tumblr. so if anyone wants to chat feel free to hmu! can't guarantee i'll respond in a timely fashion whatsoever, but i could use some bnha fans to chat and gush over characters with if anyone's interested.

thanks again - hope everyone's staying cool in this summer heat if you're in my hemisphere. it's been in the 90s recently and i just. hate it so much. i want winter back ;_;

Nemuri had been fighting a typical villain, overestimated how much of her quirk she should use against a guy who could grow and shrink, then had that guy fall on top of her while he was the size of a grizzly bear. Most of her injuries are from the fight beforehand, while the wrist and head wound were from the villain’s collapse and her subsequent smack against concrete.

This all happened across the street that could be seen from their new window, so Inko had called the cops to pick up the villain then helped

Nemuri inside to patch her up.

“She said she didn’t want to go to the hospital. Izuku didn’t recognize her - “

“Thank God for small mercies,” Shouta mutters. If Izuku had recognized the 18+ hero, they would have to discuss putting a parental lock on the wi-fi.

“So I figured she either wanted to stay out of the spotlight and was an underground hero like you, or a good Samaritan that wasn’t interested in being on the news.”

“And then this sweet young lady patched me up like a regular Florence Nightingale,” Nemuri coos. “Give her a sexy nurse’s outfit and I would’ve felt right at home. I never would’ve guessed that a sweetheart like her would put up with your grumpy ass, though.”

Inko leans across the table and, with a bright smile, says, “Watch your language, Ms. Kayama.”

“Sor - “

“Please eat.”

“Um. Okay - “

“Now.”

Nemuri’s chopsticks start shoveling food into her mouth.

Inko turns back to Shouta. “So, you see, nothing to worry about. The cops took the villain away, Ms. Kayama has been patched up, and you remembered to get Izuku’s snacks for the week. Meanwhile, we’ve finished unpacking and as long as Ms. Kayama minds her manners and remembers that there is a *child* here, you have a friend to catch up with.”

At Inko’s stink eye, Nemuri squeaks, “Yes ma’am.”

If Shouta didn’t already like Inko, the way she’s cowed Nemuri into behaving is more than enough to earn his eternal admiration.

On any other day, he’d be perfectly capable of tolerating her usual antics and giving as good as he got. After his bout of panic and with this being the first time he’s seen Nemuri in this time, he doesn’t think he can handle her over-the-top flirting without a bit of a buffer. Inko,

pretty much the perfect person, is keeping him from being overwhelmed in the aftermath of his little breakdown.

It doesn't hurt that Izuku insisted on sitting next to him at dinner and then proceeded to move his chair as close as possible to Shouta's without actively being on his lap. If it makes him feel better to have his problem child within arms' reach, he thinks that it's fairly harmless.

If it makes him smirk that Izuku keeps glaring at Nemuri for insulting him - well, that's fairly harmless too.

"So, um." Nemuri looks at Inko, who seems satisfied by both her tone and the amount of food she's eaten. "Shouta. How'd you and Inko meet? Last I heard, you were going deep undercover. I didn't know you'd resurfaced or I would've texted you to grab a drink or something."

"Undercover…?" Shouta scratches his chin and thinks. "Hm. I think I lied about that."

"Huh?"

"Pretty sure that was a lie. I still haven't signed with an agency."

"You haven't?"

"Yeah. I've been freelancing."

"Why'd you lie?" She blinks, then adds, "Why'd you lie and why are you telling the truth now?"

"I didn't want you to know I was homeless. Now I'm not homeless so I can tell you."

Nemuri, understandably, gapes at him. Shouta leans over with a napkin to wipe ketchup off of Izuku, who helpfully tilts his chin up.

"You - why didn't you say anything? You didn't have to wait and shack up with a girlfriend, you could've stayed with me!"

"I didn't want to."

"Why not?! We're friends! We could've made it work!"

"I'd've wanted to wring your neck within two days of staying with you and you would've wanted me to leave but been too nice to make me

do it."

"So being homeless was better?!"

"Not necessarily better, but we're still friends so it was the probably best option."

She buries her face in her hands and groans loudly. "Shouta, for fuc - god's sake. Are you *kidding* me? I don't care if I would've been annoyed having you with me, that's better than you not having anywhere to stay!"

"It's fine. Things are fine now."

Nemuri groans again.

The thing about his friendship with Nemuri is that as much as he cares about her, she struggles to balance what she needs with wanting to care for her friends. She wants to know everything about her friends - likes to pick at them and dig and dig and dig until she comes up with a way to sort out whatever is bothering them. She wants to fix things and comes up with what, to her, seems like a perfect solution. It's what makes her a great friend in general, but it's also what has her and Shouta butting heads more often than not.

Independent yet dependable, Hizashi used to call her.

Shouta isn't exactly great at communication. He's better than he used to be, but he's not the most eloquent, which makes it hard for him to explain his thought processes to someone who sees things as straightforward-ly as Nemuri does. The solutions that she comes up with may work in a perfect scenario, but life rarely proceeds perfectly and that means Shouta can rarely take her advice while still doing what he feels is right.

To her, the easy solution to "Shouta is homeless" is "Shouta moves in with Nemuri." And in a perfect world, that would be fine.

In this world, with all of its gritty practicality and flaws, Nemuri would've been miserable if Shouta moved in with her. Their friendship would've been irrevocably ruined. He knew this when he was a teenager just out of school, and he knows it now as a who-knows-how-old man.

For all that Nemuri is flirtatiously loud, she's not as open as she portrays herself. Her preference is to be so obnoxiously visible that no

one thinks to look for anything below the surface - when compared to Shouta and Hizashi, she's downright protective of her privacy. In high school, she had lamented time and time again that her parents refused to let her have a lock for her room.

And then, *something* happened in his last year of high school. It was a clusterfuck for more than one reason, what with their piss poor attempts at handling Oboro's death from the previous year, and all of their personalities started clashing more and more due to trauma - but something had also changed with Nemuri halfway through the first semester of that year. She was already out in the field, being a year older than them, and there must have been a case or a fight that changed her.

Something that made her even more closed off and her public flamboyance even more fake than it already had been.

Even in the future, decades after the fact, she had never told Shouta what exactly dulled the sparkle in her eye. Part of him didn't press because she clearly didn't want to talk about it, but another, larger part of him didn't want to know what had damaged her in a way Oboro's death hadn't. She had always been an open, loud person, but that year she learned how to weaponize her promiscuity scarily, terrifyingly well, and that isn't a lesson that is learned in a classroom or even on a battlefield. It's a lesson that's had in an alleyway behind a bar, or under flashing nights at a club, or, even more horrifyingly, behind closed doors at a place that was once thought to be safe.

He never found out, never pushed for that information, and he doesn't know if Nemuri in the future was thankful for that or resentful. Regardless, before he and Hizashi graduated, she had signed with the first agency that paid her enough to afford moving out and living on her own. Her privacy and security assured in a way that set her at ease and made Shouta almost forget that *something* happened.

Her independence is something she prides herself on - being depended on is another. Shouta's situation would've made her proud to help her friend yet silently miserable for resenting him for intruding on her personal space.

Because Shouta's her friend, he would never put her in that situation. And, yes, it plays into his ceaseless desire to never be a nuisance to those he cares about, but that was more of an advantage than the driver for his decision. It also let him avoid the guilt over not knowing how to help her with a problem that he can't bring himself to ask her

about.

Talking about things like that isn't how their friendship works, though - they're two equally closed off individuals who know each other like the back of their hand but don't verbally acknowledge their closeness or discuss deeper topics - so Shouta just shrugs and tugs his new blanket tighter around his shoulders.

"I wouldn't want to cramp your style or discourage any gentleman callers you may entice," Shouta says blandly. "And it gave me valuable camping experience. I also have acquired a tiny student to teach tiny fighting to, so. Things have worked out well."

Nemuri lifts her head up finally and says, "Darling, I'm sure my gentleman callers would be delighted to welcome you to our playdates. I don't bring anyone home unless they're willing to share."

"Ick."

"It can't be any worse than whatever you and your new lady love have been getting up to when the little one goes to bed," she teases.

Shouta contemplates how much of a pain it would be to deal with the aftermath of brawling with her in their nice, new living room. Inko would probably be unhappy, but she also looks about ready to tackle Nemuri and shove her out a window for implying anything filthy around her son. So maybe she'd let him get away with it.

Before he can follow through, Izuku, bless his little soul, has clearly exhausted his patience. He's been vibrating and fidgeting while the adults talk, but finally he blurts out, "Mr. 'Zawa can we PLEASE play heroes and villains 'cause I ate all my vegetables and did good on my spelling test the other day and I didn't even cry when Kacchan burnt my homework up AND I kicked good enough that you said it was good so can we PLEASE play now?"

Shouta almost cringes from how endearing he finds his problem child's pleas. Then he says, "Wait, Bakugou messed with your homework again?"

Izuku sighs dramatically. "Mr. 'Zawa, he always messes with my homework. That's why I make two copies. It actually helps a lot with studying to write it out twice! Did you know that writing stuff down activates more places in your brain than if you type stuff out? It's better for remembering stuff!"

This kid.

“But anyways can we please play now?”

Shouta looks at Nemuri. Nemuri looks back warily.

“How about we change it up tonight? I’ll be the damsel in distress. Or trapped civilian. Or someone you have to rescue. Whatever. And Nemuri can be the villain.”

Izuku turns wide green eyes to Nemuri, who shrinks back into her seat. Her eyes dart over to Inko, who looks as amused as Shouta feels. “Uh, I don’t - I’m not great with kids.”

“Ah, but you’ll be playing heroes and villains,” Shouta says. “You know how to handle heroes. And Izuku here will be a hero during the game.”

Izuku turns shy, suddenly. He ducks his head and curls his hands around each other. “U-um. If you don’t want to play. It’s okay. Y-you don’t have to, Miss Kayama.”

Nemuri’s face devolves into pure, unadulterated panic. Shouta ducks his face into his capture weapon to make sure he doesn’t start cackling. “N-no! I mean, uh, I want to play. We can play heroes and villains! I don’t. I don’t know what that is but. Oh god please don’t cry.”

Shouta leans over and nudges Izuku lightly. In a faux-whisper, he says, “You’ll have to show her the ropes, kid. I don’t think she’s ever played before.”

“Um. Miss Kayama. If you want to play, I-I can teach you. It’s really fun and if you want to be the hero you can be since you’ve never done it before a-and that’s funner - “

“Oh, but that won’t work,” Shouta butts in again. Partly to annoy Nemuri, but also partly because he knows that Izuku prefers being the hero. “You always said that I can’t be the hero since I’m already a hero and it wouldn’t be playing pretend that way. Nemuri’s a hero too, so she won’t be playing pretend unless she plays as a villain.”

Izuku’s shyness disappears as quickly as it appeared, with his head snapping up and spinning in his seat to face Nemuri. Nemuri, who somehow pales even further, says, “Um.”

“MISS KAYAMA YOU’RE A HERO TOO? WHAT KIND OF HERO ARE YOU WHAT’S YOUR QUIRK - “

Revenge is nice. Revenge that has Inko covering her face to suppress her laughter, revenge where Shouta will be able to lie on the floor and nap while playing the civilian in need of rescue from the evil, evil villain - even better.

izuku's birthday - pt.1

Chapter Summary

Another coffee date, another discussion.

Chapter Notes

hoo booooy i hope you guys are ready for this next section of the story!!! izuku's birthday was originally supposed to be 1 chapter.... and then it *grew* and it's a good chunk larger than i intended!!! so we got a lot coming up but it'll be good stuff, i promise~

thank you for reading! i'm excited for the next few chapters and can't wait to share them with you all <3

Time passes as it does when someone with a temporal quirk isn't fucking around with it.

- Shouta adds "Hisashi Midoriya" to his list of extracurricular investigations.
- Eraserhead is slowly becoming more respected and feared in turn, depending on which side of the law people fall on.
- He continues to have weekly coffee with Hizashi, who occasionally surprises him by not being hungover.
- Nemuri drags him off for lunch every once in a while to make sure he still has a roof overhead while pointedly not pestering him about the panic attack she oversaw.
- Izuku gets scarily good at kicking him in places where it hurts - not a surprise, considering Deku's proficiency with his chosen fighting style.
- Inko gets a promotion at work, becoming a senior analyst and receiving a raise that gives her some financial breathing room.

Before he knows it, Izuku's birthday is right around the corner.

Unsurprisingly, Shouta has never been much of a "celebrating" type. The closest he gets to celebrating anything is when he treats himself to a sugary coffee drink after any string of back-to-back missions. He'd go to parties if Hizashi or Nemuri made him, he'd partake in holiday traditions when forced to by those idiot students of his, but without outside interference, he's not much for joy and cheer just because a date on the calendar tells him it's time to.

As stated, his reticence isn't exactly surprising. He's a bitter old man who doesn't give much of a damn about much of anything.

Izuku's lackluster response, though.

That's disconcertingly odd.

"All kids like their birthdays," Hizashi says when he brings it up. "Maybe he's trying to do the 'too cool for school' thing? Where he doesn't want to look too eager?"

Shouta shakes his head. "Doubt it. Izuku's middle name may as well be eager. He's eager about everything. He's eager to wake up in the morning and eager to run around and exhaust me all day. That's why the *lack* of eagerness is strange."

"Hm." Hizashi scratches at his chin - miraculously free of dried drool and acne for once. He still looks like he needs a week or two of hibernation to get rid of the bags under his eyes, but he's much less of a mess than usual.

It's nice to see.

"And Inko doesn't know either?"

"Nope. She's worried."

"Like you aren't."

Shouta shrugs, uncomfortable with the comparison to Izuku's *mother* but unable to disagree. "It's strange. That's all."

"Have you asked him about it?"

Izuku's painfully bright smile as he faked excitement, his, "Oh yeah! I guess I just forgot. I'm happy of course, I'm turning eight!" and "Oh, um. Hero stuff!" when asked what he wanted for his big day, his blatantly obvious attempts to change the subject - No kid should be trying to hide what's bothering him so completely.

"He lied. Said he had forgotten about it completely. If he wasn't a kid, I'd believe him."

"But he is a kid."

He gives another tired shrug. "I don't know what to do. It's only going to be me and Inko doing anything for him, but I don't want to make

him upset if he really doesn't like his birthday."

Hizashi hums thoughtfully around a mouthful of tea. "I think that it's better for him to get upset because you did something for his birthday than for him to get upset because he thinks you forgot or didn't care enough to do something. You with me?"

It makes sense. Fits in line with what Izuku has said in not-so-many words. He nods at Hizashi, who grins back.

"So, that leads us to the next crisis - What should you do for your little listener? What does Izu-chan like best?"

"Heroes," Shouta says immediately. "The kid barely talks about anything else. He writes about them constantly. I've played more rounds of 'heroes and villains' than I can count."

"Easy then." Hizashi claps his hands together. "Now, easy question: Who's his favorite hero?"

Shouta's expression sours against his will. "All Might. Flashy, obnoxious, red-white-and-blue All Might. It's infuriating."

Hizashi presses his thumb against the table like he's pressing a button and loudly says, "BZZZZZT. Wrong."

"Wrong? I think I'd know who his favorite hero is. I live with the kid." He makes a face and mutters, "He made me learn all the words to All Might's theme song. All Might is his favorite. Obviously."

Hizashi stares at him like he's a moron, then pulls out his wallet. Tucked next to his hero license is a bright orange piece of construction paper, which he carefully pulls out and meticulously unfolds. After flattening it out a tad, he holds it out to Shouta.

"The latest card from the kid says differently."

Shouta is staring down at a childish depiction of him in his hero uniform. Picture-him has a capture weapon like a gray snake around his neck, yellow rectangles acting as his goggles, and his own scruffy face rendered in black crayon. The entire card is covered in yellow, gray, and black squiggles. And, of course, there's the scrawled, "Get better soon!" in childish handwriting that Shouta knows better than his own.

"That's not - " Shouta pushes it back at him, shaking his head and

refusing to melt into a puddle of fond goo. “Ignoring the fact that him drawing a picture of me doesn’t mean I’m his favorite hero, it’d be incredibly arrogant for me to give him a present based on me.”

“He’d lose his goddamn mind if you gave him a scarf like your capture weapon. I’d bet any amount of money on it.” Hizashi folds the card up before tucking it back into his wallet with tender care. “If he gushes about you a quarter of the amount you gush about him, I don’t think All Might stands a chance.”

He rolls his eyes. “Maybe I’ll get him some Present Mic merch. Do you have any discounts for your best friend?”

“Normally I would say yes, but in this case I want a picture of you and Izu-chan in matching outfits and therefore refuse to assist you in purchasing any item that isn’t going to help turn him into a mini-you.”

“You’re obnoxious.”

Hizashi gives him a cheesy grin and winks. “Always, babe.”

“So now that we’ve talked about my crisis,” Shouta drawls, leaning back in his seat. “What’s yours? I saw the tabloid that claimed you were going to take a break from hero work to go search for - what was it? The Loch Ness Monster?”

“The Loch - pft, nah.” He shakes his head. “Well, they weren’t wrong about the break, though I haven’t announced it officially yet.”

Shouta blinks. “Huh?”

Hizashi doesn’t meet his eyes as he gives a sheepish chuckle. “Er. Yeah. I just. Probably for the next month or so.”

He doesn’t remember seeing any news stories of dangerous fights or injuries, but - “Did you get hurt?”

“No, nothing like that.”

He fiddles with his sleeves, still not meeting Shouta’s eyes. Shouta, in turn, waits for an answer.

“I. Um. Well.”

“If you don’t want to tell me, you don’t have to force yourself.”

“No, I just. It’s embarrassing.”

He snorts. “More embarrassing than when you threw up on me after our second tactics class?”

Before he can rag on him more and use their years of friendship against him, Hizashi blurts out, “I’m going to rehab. Or, well - Something like that. It’s not like. ‘Rehab’ rehab, but it’s um. A retreat. Thing. For the drinking and everything. And they’re setting me up with a personal coach and everything for after. Accountability, you know? My agency’s been pretty cool about it, helped me get it set up. So. That’s why. I’ll be gone for bit.”

His eyes are scrunched closed by the end of his announcement, and his shoulders are high around his ears. There’s a lot of tension running through him, like Shouta’s going to laugh at him or berate him for making a, frankly, remarkable decision.

It’s not common to see someone taking active steps to better themselves. It’s even rarer to see anyone *voluntarily* decide to attend any sort of rehabilitation program without some sort of intervention.

After a pause to absorb something Shouta had never dared hope to hear - something he hadn’t heard the first time around, something he hadn’t considered would happen when last time it certainly didn’t - he says honestly, “That’s great.”

“It’s not - I mean, I don’t know how it’s going to go and maybe it’s - “

“It’s great. You’re going to do great.”

Hizashi peeks at him from behind his bangs. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

He releases a breath like it’s a gust of wind. “Thanks.”

“It’s not embarrassing, you know. Accepting help takes a lot of strength. Strength that I rarely have,” Shouta admits shamelessly. “I’m impressed. And I’m happy. Even if I’ll have to give up being the pretty one between the two of us once you stop looking like a corpse.”

That gets him an undignified snort of laughter. “You’re the worst.”

“Noted.”

Hizashi finally looks up at him, and Shouta’s taken aback by the

gratitude being directed at him. There's something soft in Hizashi's face that Shouta's only seen a few times over the duration of their friendship, something fond and affectionate and *tender* in a way that makes the back of his neck feel hot.

He reaches up to scrub at it just to be sure it's not a rash of some kind. Maybe he should wash his capture weapon, make sure there isn't some sort of pollen stuck in its fibers.

"Our first meeting here, you said that when I was ready to get help, that you'd be here. I think you were the only one who acknowledged that I even needed help. And you were here." Hizashi visibly swallows, and he gives Shouta a small, tremulous smile. "It meant a lot. Means a lot, I mean."

Shouta wants to say, "I'd do anything for you, dumbass," or "I'm sorry - I'm *so* sorry - that I made you think there was any universe where I wouldn't be there for you if you needed me, because there isn't one. There isn't," or "You're my best fucking friend in the world and losing you once was too much and nearly broke me, I can't survive it a second time."

That's too raw, though. Too laden with decades of history that this Hizashi doesn't have yet and hopefully never will.

Instead, Shouta reaches over and pokes his forehead and boredly says, "Of course. I'll always be here when you need me. And sometimes when you think you don't."

Hizashi swats at his hand, smile growing. "You know it's the same for you, right? I'm a mess right now, but I won't always be. If you need me, I'd do anything."

"How about when you get back you get dinner with my roommates? They've been dying to meet you."

"What? Of course! I didn't know, I would've met them ages ago - "

Shouta would never tell Hizashi that he wouldn't dare let him near the Midoriyas if he couldn't guarantee Hizashi was a hundred percent sober. He might trust drunk-Hizashi with his life even if the guy's a plastered jackass, but not with Inko's or Izuku's. He instead says, "I wasn't ready for the energy you and Izuku will generate together. You two in the same room together are going to be exhausting, and I had to prepare myself."

“It won’t be that bad!”

“Maybe I’ll give you Benadryl beforehand so you’re not as peppy. Or make sure Inko has chamomile tea on hand.”

“I’m not going to see you for a MONTH and you’re teasing me! Is this how you want our last coffee date to be until we reunite?”

“I want you to pay for my frappuccino, but I’ll take what I can get.”

izuku's birthday - pt.2

Chapter Summary

The beginning of a very long day.

Chapter Notes

guys you all are too sweet... i keep being really pleasantly surprised by how positive of a reception this fic has been receiving since it's 95% me going "i just want izuku to have nice things" and aizawa, being my fave character, got the dubious pleasure of being the Main Character. thank you all for the support <3

i also just realized i didn't include a hurt/comfort tag on this fic which is a HUGE mistake b/c it's like. 95% hurt/comfort at all times. so tags will be updated when i get a free min to do that.

hope you all like this chapter - there's some explanation of things happening off-screen, and we get some insight into inko's stressors in this one!

(also, if you have the time and care enough!!! **question for all of you:** if i wrote some one-shots of different characters in this 'verse and what's happening with them from their perspective rather than shouta's, is that something you'd be interested in? and if yes, what characters are you most curious about? i can't guarantee i'll get around to this anytime soon b/c i don't want to lose my momentum with the fic itself, so i'm mostly gauging interest for if inspiration strikes. it'd be in a separate work - this work is going to only be shouta's POV if it keeps going according to plan. anyway - lmk~!)

Izuku's birthday happens to fall on the last day of the semester. This is, coincidentally, the day after one of Shouta's biggest "Let's Fix the Future" operations comes to an end.

(The name is a misnomer - it implies that he had any sort of plan when he ended up in the past. He certainly didn't plan to live with the Midoriyas or accidentally stumble upon Chisaki's predecessor and subsequently take out Overhaul's operation within the first year after his arrival.)

It means that Inko wakes up even earlier than usual to prepare a special breakfast, and Shouta doesn't bother falling asleep after getting back from the police station. Inko gripes at him for coming back even later (earlier? The terminology gets iffy once it passes three in the morning) than usual and proceeds to fuss over the bruises and cuts he accumulated.

"It's not that bad," Shouta assures her, still dazed. "Not nearly as bad as last time. I didn't think it'd go so easily, to be honest."

"Whatever it was, you're a mess," Inko says, unimpressed. She looks disdainfully at the dust and debris coating his hair, shoulders, arms, thighs - well, his *everything* . "Go take a shower. You can sleep the rest of the day after we send Izuku off to school with a good start to his birthday."

"Yeah yeah, I'm going."

The shower is a welcome relief, its warm water relaxing muscles that he didn't realize were still tense, soap washing away at least a week's worth of grime, if not more. He hadn't realized he'd let his hygiene go for so long - too caught up in work, too preoccupied with making sure said work didn't follow him home, too exhausted to give a damn about anything except putting certain yakuza bastards behind bars.

There's going to be an inquiry, he knows. He was too rough with apprehending Chisaki.

What they found at his base of operations will be more than enough to put him away for the rest of his life - organizing human experimentation and trafficking rings tend to be for-life sentences on their own, the two together utterly damning, and the Shie Hassaikai's boss has blacklisted Chisaki from any yakuza contacts within law enforcement. Even with that, if he somehow doesn't get convicted, the Shie Hassaikai itself will ensure the rest of his life is short.

Essentially, Chisaki's life is virtually over no matter what happens from now on out. There wasn't any need for Shouta to be as brutal with the apprehension as he was.

Then he remembers the cages full of people - children, teenagers, adults, people of all ages and races and quirk types - who flinched when Shouta unlocked their restraints. Who were trembling and crying as they were shepherded into vans and ambulances, depending on their state. Who, even though they were being saved, didn't look relieved or hopeful in the slightest.

It makes him sick to think that those people were long dead by the time Shouta even knew of Overhaul the first time around. And to think that, decades in the future, none of them had any idea of how many subjects there had been before Eri - it's horrific.

Chisaki was arrested with a mangled leg and a nose that looked more like playdough than anything else. It's less than he deserves and kinder than he had been to dozens of innocents.

It feels anticlimactic.

Here Shouta is, showering and preparing for a child's birthday party, while Overhaul is drugged up on quirk suppressants and on his way to prison. One of the most fearsome enemies he's come across, a man who was only stopped last time due to Deku and Eri's stubbornness suddenly is no longer a problem.

Thanks to some carefully planted intel and the current boss's lack of mercy, Shouta ended Chisaki before he took control of the Shie Hassaikai. Even with his astonishingly powerful quirk, he was no match against a squad of pros and plenty of federal agents.

Nemuri took out everyone except Overhaul - the man's mysophobic ways had him wearing a mask that purified all air he breathed, rendering her gas useless against him. Still, even with him unaffected by her somnic aroma, Chisaki didn't stand a chance with Shouta's quirk and physical body at their peaks.

There's a chance that the Shie Hassaikai will be a problem in the future. Rei - the name of its current boss - is far from a saint, of course.

Rei, however, dotes on his daughter.

Alana, a half-American girl with white hair and red eyes that were alarmingly familiar, has clearly lived a good life. She's a flirtatious, irresponsible but beloved heiress, and Rei indulges her at every turn. Shouta only spoke to them once, at a nightclub that was hot and crowded enough to make him sweat just thinking about the place, but it was enough of a look to understand how Chisaki got his hands on Eri the first time around. His guess is that Alana was too busy partying to take care of a child and Rei, a family man at heart, took Eri in as his own.

It's also likely why Chisaki killed Rei the first time around - to get a hold of his granddaughter and use her for his crusade against quirks.

Rei doesn't seem like the kind of man that would tolerate his blood being used as a lab experiment, no matter how useful or profitable.

The Shie Hassakai may be a problem later, but right now, they're relatively harmless. Some drug smuggling, some thuggish behavior, but nothing that Shouta is inclined to step in on. If the cops want to waste their time cracking down on their territory - more power to the pigs. Rei runs an extremely clean ship and nothing will stick.

Maybe this time Eri will grow up with her family. It makes him smile and breaks his heart at the same time.

Through the haze of exhaustion and processing what, exactly, he just accomplished, he somehow finishes shampooing and cleaning himself.

As he's rinsing off, there's a loud knock at the door. It's too heavy and early to be from Izuku, so Inko must be fed up with how long he's been in the bathroom. She's exceptionally good at demonstrating her displeasure with things like pointed knocking and cutting looks, all completely wordlessly.

Shouta doesn't know if it's an Inko-thing or a mom-thing. His own mother, hardly a stellar example of parenting, barely ever looked at him and when she did, she had plenty to say.

Dutifully, he towels off and gets dressed in clean clothes. Inko had tossed a wad of cash at him a few weeks back and begged him to buy more clothes, saying, "You can't cycle through your hero costume and your two casual outfits every three days until laundry day when laundry day is once a week. You sweat too much for that."

"I don't sweat that much," Shouta protested.

"You sweat enough. I don't care what you buy, but you need to get at least five more outfits."

So, instead of the same jeans and tank top he had been living in for who-knows-how-long, he wanders into the kitchen wearing pink sweatpants and a black t-shirt. Inko has somehow managed to make enough food to feed an army before Izuku's even considered waking up and has now moved onto frantically wrapping the last gifts she's pulled together for him.

"Can I help with anything?"

“Get us our coffee, and once we’re through the first pot, we’ll go and wake Izuku up. I don’t want him opening most of his gifts before school or else he’ll be distracted with whatever one we let him take with for the day, but I want him to have enough time to eat and open at least one.”

“Got it.”

“Maybe the notebooks? He’ll be able to use them without being disruptive… Or the All Might pen…”

“Probably not the pen. He’ll click it since it does the whole arm-flex thing when you do, and his teachers suck so they'll probably confiscate it.”

“Ah, good point. Notebooks it is and we’ll do everything else after dinner and cake.”

Shouta, staring at the coffee maker as liquid drips into the pot, tosses her a thumbs up.

For a while, they go about their respective tasks. There’s the gentle sounds of scissors cutting into wrapping paper and the tape dispenser rolling, coffee drip-drip-dripping into the pot, some gentle humming from Inko when she gets to the corners of each package. Before Shouta knows it, the lingering unease he has leftover from work has drained away and he has two mugs full of caffeine.

Shouta carefully sets Inko’s mug down away from her wrapping station, and she gives him a brisk nod of gratitude. He sips and lets warmth seep into his hands.

Halfway through his mug, his calm is disrupted when Inko suddenly slams her scissors down and rests her head in her hands. Some of her untouched coffee splashes onto the table and Shouta, against his will, startles and almost drops his drink.

Inko’s shoulders are shaking, and her palms are digging into her eyes. Shouta asks, “What’s wrong?”

“What kind of child isn’t excited about their birthday? I don’t - I don’t know what else I can do. I don’t know what else TO do. Am I a bad mother? Is it my fault?”

“Inko, no - “ he lets his mug clatter to the table and darts to stand next to her, grabbing her shoulders and twisting her to face him. She looks

at him miserably, dry-eyed and eerily blank. “You’re not a bad mother.”

“My son’s being horrifically abused by everyone in his life that isn’t in this apartment. And I keep sending him back - I keep letting him go to school and get beaten down, physically and emotionally, and god only knows what’s happening that he hides from us, and I just. Let him.” A strange, choked noise escapes her throat, and then it evolves into a - still dry - sob. “I let him go back even as they’re hurting him, Shouta. What kind of mother does that?”

“A practical one.”

She laughs, but it sounds painful. She closes her eyes and pinches her nose, face twisted. “Practical. Great. Just what a mother should be. Practical. I’m a disgrace. What kind of mother values practicality over her child’s happiness?”

Shouta meant it as a compliment, or at the very least a comfort. Sometimes he forgets that what he as a hero thinks is a good trait to have isn’t how other people necessarily view the situation.

He could try to be comforting, but that’s never been his strong point. He goes for blunt honesty instead. “Inko, your son has been handed an unbelievably shitty set of circumstances. He’s quirkless and people will always judge him for that. He’s sensitive and gentle at heart, and they’ll mistreat him for that too. He’s not going to ever have an easy life.”

She throws her hands up in the air and spins to look at him, snapping, “Shouta, for fuck’s sake - “

“But,” he continues firmly. “He’s strong. He’s kind. He still smiles. He’s going to be a hero - hell, he already is one to you *and* to me. Neither of us would be half as happy if he wasn’t here. I wouldn’t be here, relatively healthy and whole and happier than I’ve been in longer than I’m comfortable admitting, without him.”

He pauses and waits for Inko to look him in the eyes. When she finally does, he says, “Do not disrespect your son by making his struggles about you.”

Inko’s eyes widen.

“He’s strong enough to handle all of this if you’re supporting him completely. If you’re giving it your all and then some. If you split your

attention between him and your own self-pity, then you're doing him and the pain he's actively working to overcome a disservice."

They stare at each other for a moment.

"But - " Inko's voice falters. "You don't get it. How terrible it feels - I can't even give him one day where he's treated the way he should be."

"I'm not Izuku's parent. I won't pretend to understand how you feel and how hard this is for you. I know, for me, it *burns* when I go to pick him up and he's clearly just stopped crying. It *kills* me that neither of us has a job or lifestyle where we can home-school him and shield him from everything." He shrugs helplessly. "Can't change any of that though. He wants to be a pro-hero - he has to go to school to be one. That's all there is to it.

"What we can do, though, is support him. We can treat him the way he should be within our home and make sure he knows how great he is." He stands up straight, shoves his hands in his pockets, and shrugs. "I think that starts with not blubbering all over his birthday breakfast, but, again, I'm not the parent here."

Inko stares at him as he raises an eyebrow at her. After a long, weighted pause, she shakes her head and snorts. "You're something else, Shouta. Go get the birthday boy, will you?"

He does.

When he gently shakes him awake, muttering, "C'mon kid. Birthday time. Your mom made breakfast," Izuku's bleary, "Huh?" is cuter than it has any right to be.

Shouta can't stop himself from ruffling the curly green hair. Izuku proceeds to whine incoherently and tries to burrow back into the sheets. He runs his hand through Izuku's hair and lets the kid have another two minutes of coziness - it's his birthday, after all.

Then he swings Izuku up and carries him out to the living room, ignoring his tired groan. Izuku latches onto him and curls his limbs around Shouta's middle, grumbling and tucking his head under Shouta's chin.

Like a recalcitrant koala, Shouta thinks.

"Izuku!" Inko cheers when they make it to the living room. She has a

little party popper, which shoots off red, yellow, and blue confetti when she sets it off. Izuku perks up a little, looking at her in confusion. Inko's face is remarkably clear of any signs of her earlier meltdown, and she beams at her son and walks up to press gentle kisses against every inch of his face. By the time she reaches his nose, he's giggling and squirming in Shouta's arms. "Happy birthday! You're getting so *big* , I can't stand it! You won't be my little baby boy much longer, especially with Shouta teaching you how to be big and strong."

Izuku, smiling and visibly pleased, says, "I'm gonna be your big and strong hero instead, Mama!"

Inko's beaming face somehow gets brighter. "Of course you are. I can't wait."

"Big and strong heroes need to eat breakfast," Shouta says tonelessly. "You going to let go anytime soon to do that, or…?"

Izuku giggles and lets go of the death grip he has on Shouta's neck. Because it's his birthday, Shouta places him on his feet instead of dropping him like he normally does. And, because it's his birthday, Shouta doesn't hide how happy he is when Izuku smiles up at him.

izuku's birthday - pt.3

Chapter Summary

Off to school.

Chapter Notes

guys ;_; first off thank you for the kind words and kudos. you're all delightful and i appreciate it so so so so so much.

second off: thank you for answering last chapter's question!!! i'll definitely put some other POV ideas on the back burner - hizashi was a big hitter, so i'll think about what i can do with him.

onto this chapter: i apologize in advance for the cliffhanger, but i promise i have the next chapter written already and just have to edit it, so you won't have to wait long for the resolution. <3 trust the process, it'll be worth it!! we got a lotta good hurt/comfort coming up and it's going to be leading up to some really good stuff i'm excited about <3

thank you, and please enjoy! if you want to chat at any point, i'm on tumblr with the same username i use here~

Izuku is, of course, delighted by the hero-themed notebooks they present him with after he's eaten his fill. The rest of his "getting-ready-for-school" time is spent with him audibly debating whether to use the All Might or Ectoplasm notebook for math.

Shouta tries to encourage him to use the Ectoplasm one without saying, "He'll be your math teacher in a few years and I know your first day at UA will be absolutely hysterical if you have childhood math notes stashed somewhere in a notebook with his face on it."

It's unclear if his efforts are fruitful or not. Izuku won't decide until he starts working on math, probably, so Shouta will just have to wait.

Surprisingly, the notebook with the number two hero's face on it is left behind. Endeavor, looking out sternly from a wall of flames, is tossed haphazardly onto Izuku's desk when the boy starts to load up his backpack for the day.

"Not a fan of Endeavor?" Shouta asks, interested despite himself. He knew that Deku had never worked well with Enji Todoroki, but he

hadn't thought Izuku had a single hero he disliked. A fanboy through and through, up until now there's seemingly been no limit to his hero worship.

Izuku pauses from where he's pulling on his socks. He glances at the notebook in question, then turns back to Shouta. "You know how you said awhile back that the world isn't divided into just heroes and villains?"

"Uh. Sounds like something I'd say." This kid's memory is something else. Shouta vaguely remembers saying something similar, a few days before they moved to their current apartment, but not in any detail.

"Well. You said, 'The world isn't divided into heroes and villains. Not the way those shows you like watching try to say. Sometimes, someone causing a problem is just a person in a bad position. Just because someone is getting arrested doesn't mean they're a villain, or even a bad person,'" he recites dutifully. "And I think the opposite's true, too. Just because someone's getting someone arrested doesn't mean they're a hero. Endeavor's popular, but I don't really know why. He's always talked about on the news 'cause he injured civilians or someone's mad at him for breaking things he shouldn't or for hurting people he shouldn't." Izuku stands up and stretches.

Shouta stares at him blankly.

Izuku, undeterred, continues, "I don't think he's very heroic. His stats in regards to civilian lives and livelihoods left unaffected in the wake of villain attacks are significantly worse than not only All Might's, but almost all of the other heroes in the top ten. Sure, his quirk is destructive - I can't think of many situations where fire as strong as his can be used in a non-damaging way - but there's plenty of situations where he shouldn't have to use his quirk but he does anyway. He never runs or touches people he's apprehending if he doesn't have to, you know? He just scares them into giving up by overwhelming them with fire. And I don't think that's something a hero should do."

This *kid* .

Shouta says, "Warn me if you ever decide to be anything other than a hero. You're *seven* and talking about subjects that people my age don't with maturity that people twice my age don't have."

Izuku puffs up his chest and says, proudly, "Mr. 'Zawa, I'm eight now!"

“My mistake. You’re practically ancient now, I forgot.”

Getting Izuku to school is normal, other than the way he drags his feet the entire way. It doesn’t matter to him if they take a little longer than usual - Shouta doesn’t give a damn if Izuku is late, since it’s not like anyone at that school deserves his respect.

Their walk to school is more of a stroll than anything else, but they eventually make it to the school gates. The bell either just rang or is about to, seeing as there are only a few stragglers walking in when they arrive. Izuku doesn’t pick up his pace - if anything, he slows down at the sight.

Shouta glances down at him, then up at the school. “You going in?”

“Y-yeah. In a minute.”

“Okay.”

Izuku’s hands are wrapped tightly around his backpack straps. He’s looking at the ground with a strangely determined expression. His breaths are evenly measured - if Shouta’s not wrong, it’s five counts in and five counts out. The same way Inko does when she’s feeling overwhelmed, and a habit Shouta’s picked up as well.

“You alright?”

“Mr. ‘Zawa, do you really think I can be a hero?” Izuku looks up at him, lips pressed tightly together. “You haven’t been saying it just to be nice?”

Shouta blinks.

“It’s okay if you were,” Izuku continues quietly. “I know you’re nice. But I just want to know for sure.”

“You have damn near photographic memory and you don’t remember what I’ve said at least a dozen times - I’m not nice, kid.” Shouta wraps an arm around his shoulders, drags him in close, and scrubs his knuckles against Izuku’s head roughly in reprimand. “Which means I don’t say shit I don’t mean just to spare anyone’s feelings. You have the potential to be a hero if you work hard and work smart. Don’t doubt yourself or else everyone else will too. Got it?”

Izuku’s heel slams onto his right foot and he wriggles out of Shouta’s hold easily - proof that their self-defense training is sticking, which

makes Shouta's chest glow with a familiar pride. Most wouldn't believe it, but he really does miss teaching.

Izuku's bright smile is enough for now, though. He says, "Thanks Mr. 'Zawa. I'm gonna make you proud."

"Yeah yeah. I'll believe it when I see it." He's smiling too, though. "Are you actually going to get to class anytime soon or are you going to spend the entire day moping out here?"

Izuku chirps, "Yessir - Bye Mr. 'Zawa!" and runs off to start his day.

Shouta waits until he sees Izuku enter the building, then he turns around and leaves to run his errands for the day. He can hear his bed - his *bed* , he thinks longingly - crying for him to rest, especially with the day off to such an emotional start already.

But - and he will only ever admit this in the safety of his own head - Hizashi was right. Which means he needs to go buy a better gift for Izuku than the ugly All Might mug he had (with great reluctance) bought for him weeks ago.

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By the time he finds what he's looking for, taken a short nap, and altered and wrapped the stupid things, it's just about time to walk Izuku home from school. There's not enough time for him to take another nap, but there's enough that it'd be weird for him to go straight to the school and hang around until the bell rings.

It's already a miracle that no one's called the cops on him yet when picking Izuku up, considering he clearly isn't a parent or older brother and looks like he's still homeless even on a good day. He doesn't need to press his luck by hanging around longer than necessary.

He stops by a convenience store for a can of iced coffee to kill some time, and when that only cuts out approximately five minutes, he

decides to give Nemuri a call and meander his way over to the elementary school. At least he'll look busy while he approaches, which might make him look less like a weird old guy hanging around.

For once, she picks up almost right away. She's always fumbling with her phone for at least a few rings since she wears tight clothes with even tighter pockets.

"Hey Shouta - Theoretically, if my rice cooker is smoking, do you think I should unplug it?"

She must be home and wearing sweatpants. That explains the quick response.

"Obviously."

"Cool, I definitely knew that. I'll just. Unplug it. And I'll leave it there. Move the curtains so it doesn't light those up - Anyway!" she says cheerily. "What's up? It's rare for you to call me. Normally I'm the one chasing after you. Still have a roof overhead?"

"Yes."

"Great! Keep it that way. Make sure you're treating them right - Wouldn't want your cute little wifey ditching your lazy ass, you got me?"

"Stop calling Inko that. It's weird."

"But she's adorable~"

"She also needs other adult friends. Don't suppose you'd want to help with that?"

He waits for a bit.

When Nemuri doesn't answer, he glances at his phone then puts it back up to his ear. "Hello?"

"I'm still here. Just - surprised."

Shouta feels his brow furrow. "Why? I didn't think it was that weird of a request. You don't have to if you don't want to, but you seem to like her alright."

"You know I don't get along great with other women." He can imagine the hand wave she makes at that comment. "I'm too catty. Too

‘promiscuous.’”

“You think Inko would judge you for that? Despite her innocent face, I assure you she knows what sex is. See: her child, which she gave birth to and presumably had intercourse to create.”

“Shouta,” she says with exasperation. “You know what I mean. Women think I’m a slut and they’re either jealous or bitter or judgey. Inko seems nice, but even she was pissed at me when I was over for dinner. Remember?”

“No,” Shouta responds bluntly. “I remember that she was politely telling you to stop being crude in front of her son, who is in elementary school, and if she hadn’t told you off for talking that way in front of him I would’ve done it myself.”

“Same difference - “

“No, it’s not. There are some things you don’t talk to kids about. That’s why your PR department calls you the eighteen-plus hero and not the ‘for all ages, general audiences’ hero. If it’s something you’d say in costume, you don’t say it to kids even if they’re mature. But that doesn’t mean you can’t say it ever - just know the crowd.”

Nemuri lets out a low whistle. “Damn. What’s with the sudden lecture? You mad at me or something?”

He’s not mad - not really, at least. At least not at her.

This Nemuri hasn’t become a teacher and toed the lines of professionalism and harassment just yet. She’s always been one of his best friends, but he long ago admitted that her behavior around the UA students the first time around had pissed him off. Nedzu had never stepped in since there weren’t any student complaints.

Of course there weren’t, Shouta argued. Too many hormonal teenagers took it as a compliment that Midnight, sex icon and objectively the most beautiful woman in any room she walked into, would tease and mess around with them. She receives more confession letters on Valentine’s Day than anyone Shouta’s ever known.

Nedzu, for all of his intelligence, rarely gave a damn about anything that wouldn’t get them into legal trouble or hurt their reputation. He had told Shouta to come back if he suspected anything untoward. Until then, though, he didn’t see the harm in desensitizing the easily-flustered students to implied sexual advances when sexuality and

“selling sex” is inexorably intertwined with the core of pro-hero work.

She’d never act on any of her flirtations, which is the only reason Shouta was able to maintain a friendship with her. And even then, there were long periods of strain between them. Their inability to discuss emotions with each other or talk in any language other than snark never helped either.

He knows she doesn’t mean anything by it and really, truly thinks that she’s just playing around. That her words and flirting are harmless fun. And maybe he’s sensitive and overprotective of his students - maybe it’s not as big of a deal as it feels to him. No one had ever complained or expressed discomfort. Maybe it’s Shouta’s own discomfort coloring his judgement.

Still, though - he can’t stop himself from encouraging her to be less raunchy around children this time around. Maybe she’ll be more appropriate and Shouta won’t have to clench his teeth whenever he sees her laughing at a red-faced kid. Maybe they won’t grow apart as much as they did last time.

He can try, at least.

So he says, “No. It’s just - Being around a kid all the time changes your perspective. Being around a kid like Izuku, who already has a rough go of it - You’d want to protect him too. He’s just a kid and he’s already going through so much. You can’t blame Inko for wanting to keep him safe and innocent for as long as she can.”

At her silence, he adds, “Inko was looking out for Izuku - doesn’t mean she doesn’t like you. Doesn’t mean she was judging you. I have it on good authority that between the two of us, I’m more of a prude than she is.”

She’s still silent for a few moments longer. Shouta doesn’t know why - he didn’t think he said anything that crazy. Eventually, she snorts loudly and says, “When’d you figure that out, lover boy? On the third date, or… ?”

“Look, the whole point of this conversation was to ask if you’d be open to hanging out with Inko. Am I going to get an answer any time soon?”

“If it means that much to you, sure. We’ll have a girls night or something. Happy?”

“Immeasurably,” he says dryly. “You’re a goddess among mortals, of course.”

“Ooh, tell me more~”

“Don’t push it.”

“Shoutaaaa, just because you have a new woman in your life doesn’t mean you have to - “

“Hang on,” he cuts her off abruptly. “There’s something going on.”

The elementary school looks the same as always, with kids chattering as they leave the grounds and head home. Most of them seem unbothered, outside of a few who are looking off to the side in the direction that caught Shouta’s attention. They walk on, visibly discomfited by the noise but powering forward anyway.

Strange, considering kids tend to rubberneck like the most annoying civilians.

A sinking feeling in his stomach spurs him to jog towards where the commotion is coming from. Off to the right, past the dinky little playground they have for recess, on the edge of the woods - and there it is.

Izuku is surrounded by a group of kids. Not in a fun, playful way, but in a dangerous way that has Shouta’s breath stuck in his throat.

And Izuku - gentle, kind, babbly but polite Izuku - is standing his ground and *screaming* .

He’s hung up on Nemuri and started sprinting forward before he catches his breath.

izuku's birthday - pt.4

Chapter Summary

Eraserbit's debut.

Chapter Notes

i told you guys i wouldn't keep you waiting too long!!! i like this chapter So Much and i hope you guys do too ＜3

also: gentle request? please don't send threatening comments even in jest ;_; i know that you guys were probably joking (i hope???) since last chapter was a cliffhanger, but it doesn't feel good to get a "i'm gonna x y z u if you don't post soon!!!" - i appreciate that you like the story so much and that you're feeling intensely about the fic and all, so thank you for that intensity! i would just prefer if it wasn't scary intensity. please and thank you very much!!!

this one is also a cliffhanger, but it's a less dramatic one (i think at least lol) - so, once again, i'll post the next as soon as i can ＜3 thank you all for reading!!!

Part of Shouta - the part that isn't panicking, isn't talking himself down from attacking elementary age children to get to his boy and keep him from getting hurt further - is proud of Izuku.

Izuku has a bloody nose, a swollen eye, and a truly impressive snarl. He's shouting and pointing at Bakugou - of course it's Bakugou, of course it would be him - so furiously that the blonde-haired snot is backing away with a stunned expression. Even as he stutters and stammers over some words, he's going strong and clearly is reaming his tormentor out.

And it's obvious that he hasn't had to raise a single hand. Izuku has kept his promise not to fight back even though Shouta *knows* he's trained him well enough to take down any and all of his bullies.

Shouta slows down as he approaches, seeing that there doesn't appear to be any further threat of violence.

And part of him - the part that's proud of Izuku - thinks Izuku needs this. Thinks that *Bakugou* needs it.

So he tucks his hands behind his back, and he waits. From his

position, he can clearly hear what Izuku is yelling.

“ - This isn’t what real heroes do, Kacchan! They don’t fight people who don’t fight back, they d-don’t hurt the people who admire them, they don’t! If All Might was here, he wouldn’t hurt someone just ‘cause they were weak! He’d tell you to stop and you know it! You’re smarter than this!”

Something in that statement sends Bakugou back another step, his face twisting strangely. Only Izuku’s heaving breaths can be heard, though, as the other kids are dead silent.

“And of course you’re going to be a hero because you’re amazing but - but - but I think you’re going to be a bad one!” Izuku sobs, scrubbing at his face. A mixture of snot, blood, and tears smears on his face and his hands. “I think you’re going to be a bad hero and that’s worse than a v-villain ‘cause people will trust you and look up to you a-and - it hurts a lot worse when a hero hurts you! I’d rather anyone else hurt me than you, Kacchan, ‘cause I think you’re great but you j-just k-keep h-hurting me - “

“Deku - “

“SHUT UP!” he shrieks, slamming his hands over his ears. “I HATE THAT NAME! I HATE IT! I HATE YOU! JUST SHUT UP!”

That’s Shouta’s cue to step in.

He stalks forward and pushes past the silent kids, pushes a gobsmacked Bakugou back another step, and swoops down to pick Izuku up. He tucks that green mop of hair under his chin and lets Izuku bury his face into his chest, still screaming and sobbing.

Without looking at any of the other kids, he walks away without any further fanfare. One hand cradles Izuku’s head, and the other urges him to wrap his legs and arms around Shouta, which Izuku does quickly.

He thinks he might hear a quiet, “I - De - Izuku - “ from Bakugou, but he doesn’t turn around. He has significantly longer legs than anyone there, so he outpaces them all with ease. A few of them start muttering in hushed tones, but he can’t make out anything distinct when Izuku’s wailing in his ears.

He makes some nonsensical soothing noises - mostly just some toneless humming and shushing, which is far from sufficient but is all

he can offer as comfort. He forces himself not to suffocate the poor kid, no matter how tightly he wants to hold him.

Izuku stops yelling eventually.

His crying continues, but it steadily fades into something less desperate. He clutches Shouta tightly and periodically hiccups into his neck. Shouta rubs his back until the hiccups die down completely. Even once Izuku's calmed down to a manageable level of distress, Shouta doesn't stop walking until they're safely home, the door locked behind them.

He heads to the bathroom immediately to grab first-aid supplies. Inko keeps the less intense supplies (e.g. All Might bandaids, All Might-themed disinfectant, All Might *colored* cough syrup since there's at least a few things the man's marketing team hasn't gotten around to making in his image yet...) underneath the sink for easy access if Izuku gets a papercut while flipping through his notebooks. He has plastic-covered fingers more often than not, so it's a system that makes sense. Anything Shouta might need after a patrol - heavy-duty disinfectant, rolls of bandages and gauze, a stitching kit, adult-strength painkillers - is kept in his room so he doesn't leave any grisly scenes for the other two to stumble upon in the morning. One time was apparently enough, if Inko's early morning shriek of terror was anything to go by.

From what he can tell, Izuku doesn't have anything that ice can't fix. Shouta will check him over completely to be sure, but he doesn't think he'll need more than the basics.

The box is oddly light when he digs it out. Shouta's probably too used to the heft of his own supplies, always filled to the brim and some excess. He's tried to tell Inko that he doesn't need so much - and if he did, he'd probably just go to the hospital at that point - but after a few protests, it became clear that it made her feel better to know that he had anything he could possibly need in the event of an emergency.

When Shouta carries Izuku over to the living room and tries to set him down on the couch, Izuku refuses to let go of his neck.

"I can't get you patched up if you don't let go."

Izuku stubbornly shakes his head into his chest.

"'Zuku. Please."

He hiccups once. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“I was yelling. And I don’t really hate K-kacchan.” He sniffles. “I was just mad.”

“In this case - well, obviously you can’t go around being angry and screaming at everyone all the time when they make you angry. You know that. In this case, though, when you’ve been hurt so often by him and everyone around…” Shouta trails off, sighing. “You weren’t wrong to lash out for once. I don’t think so, at least. Bakugou’s been hurting you for a long time, ‘Zuku, and you didn’t say anything uncalled for considering his behavior.”

He sniffles again and finally pulls back from Shouta’s embrace, letting him place him onto the sofa. Shouta kneels in front of him so their eyes are just about level, and he waits.

Eventually, Izuku looks at him. Lip wobbling, eyes wet, and face a complete mess, he says, “He was my only friend. A-and I thought - I thought if I was stronger, if I w-wasn’t so weak and ugly and useless that maybe things would get better. ‘Cause he wants to be a hero, so they gotta be strong, so -

“But you’re still nice to me even with all of that and you’re a hero. So then I thought maybe - maybe if I told him what a real hero is like, he’d be nicer and wouldn’t h-hit me anymore. But that didn’t work ‘cause he didn’t believe that I know an actual hero and Mama said I can’t tell anyone your hero name so I couldn’t prove that I do.

“And I didn’t know what to do next ‘cept dodge and run like you taught me, but then he was hitting someone else who wasn’t as fast as me, a-and - “ he starts crying again. “You wouldn’t hit someone just ‘cause they were weak, Mr. ‘Zawa! Good heroes don’t do that! And I don’t hate Kacchan but no one else was telling him he was being a hero wrong so I had to! I-I thought I’d talk to him today ‘cause it’s my birthday and he knows it so maybe he’d be nicer today but he wouldn’t LISTEN so I was mad and I started yelling a-and I h-h-hate that h-he calls me Deku s-s-s-so m-m-much - “

“Shh,” Shouta says. He reaches out and pulls Izuku into a tight, tight hug. “It’s okay. You’re okay.”

“I d-don’t want to be useless, I d-don’t w-w-want t-to be a deku Mr. ‘Zawa,” he sobs. “I don’t want to be a deku, I don’t want you t-to hate

me ‘cause I’m useless and *bad* !”

“You’re not any of those things. You’re not.”

Izuku wails wordlessly over Shouta’s shoulder, crying harder.

Shouta’s voice sounds odd even in his own ears when he says, “Izuku, ‘Zuku, honey, you’re not any of that. You’re not useless or weak or ugly - You’re certainly not *bad* . And I wouldn’t hate you even if you were all of those at the same time. Okay?” When Izuku doesn’t respond, he pushes him back so he’s looking the kid in the eye. “Okay?”

Izuku scrubs at his face and nods miserably. He doesn’t look half as reassured as Shouta would prefer.

Shouta stands up abruptly and says, “Wait here.”

It takes him all of ten seconds to stride to the dining room, pick up the gift that looks like it was wrapped by a toddler, and return. He shoves it none-too-gently into Izuku’s arms.

“Open it.”

Children should look excited to open presents. They should be smiling and bouncing and giggling when it’s their birthday. They shouldn’t look at a box covered in ugly, boring blue paper like it’s the most awe-inspiring thing they’ve ever come across.

And Shouta knows it’s because this is the first time Izuku’s received a gift from someone who isn’t his mother since he was told he was quirkless. He knows that Izuku’s, “You got me a gift?” isn’t a slight against Shouta or surprise that his prickliness would allow him to get Izuku a present.

He repeats, “Open it.”

Izuku is still subdued, but his eyes are lighting up as he rips the paper. He’s not messy about it, but he’s not overly careful either. When the wrapping is all torn and tossed aside, Izuku hesitantly pulls the lid of the box off.

The way that Izuku’s face immediately brightens as his head snaps up to look at Shouta in disbelief - Shouta’s going to have to thank Hizashi for the idea. As annoying as the man is when he’s right, it seems like he hit the nail on the head in this case.

“They’re just like yours!” Izuku rips the scarf and goggles out of the box, running his hands over them reverently. The goggles aren’t a perfect match, but he was able to melt the frame to mold it into a similar rectangular shape and replacing the strap was easy enough. The scarf isn’t anything special - just two cheap gray scarves stitched together to be longer. Despite that, Izuku’s staring at them like they’re a treasure chest full of gold. “I can dress up like Eraserhead!”

“Only until you get your own hero costume. Got me?” Shouta pries both items out of Izuku’s hands so he can carefully pull the goggles over Izuku’s head. He’s careful to avoid tangling them in his fluffy hair, but a few curls escape and stick out to the side once the goggles are set in place right above his forehead.

He then scrubs at Izuku’s face lightly to get the worst of the blood, snot, and tears off, before picking up the scarf. He loops it around Izuku’s tiny neck over and over, then makes sure the tail is tucked in. No need to have him tripping over the damn thing and breaking his fragile little neck. Izuku’s visible delight grows incandescent when Shouta’s finished.

“You’re special, you know. To me. I wouldn’t let just anyone wear my merch. So stop saying mean stuff about my biggest fan.” He pokes Izuku’s nose in mild reprimand. “He’s why I do what I do, after all. And he’s a very, very good kid.”

Izuku tears up again. It’s happy this time from what Shouta can tell, since he’s beaming and wriggling in his seat. “Thank you Mr. ‘Zawa!” He ducks his face into his scarf and lets out a muffled giggle, burying both hands in it and squeezing it tightly. “I get to dress like a real hero! It’s so cool! And it even bunches up like yours, and the goggles are almost the same!”

Seeing Izuku so happy over cheap, last minute faux-merch for Eraserhead should be embarrassing. Shouta’s always been critical of fans and their worship for pros. In little kids, he minds it less, but there’s still been instances where he had to refrain from rolling his eyes when Izuku would lose his mind over a new action figure or hoodie. He’d been grateful that underground heroes don’t have to deal with fans or marketing or merchandise. The idea of someone wandering around with a keychain with his face on it makes him want to crawl into a hole and never return.

Izuku’s delighted though. Because he gets to dress like a “real hero.” Instead of feeling embarrassed, Shouta’s *proud* .

He's proud that he can be a symbol - for hope, for safety, for whatever Izuku associates him with - for someone who has it so rough. He's proud that Izuku wants to emulate him. He's proud that someone he cares for admires him.

Ick.

It doesn't stop him from smiling. He says, "Alright, mini-me. Let's get you cleaned up so we can jump right into birthday shenanigans when your mom gets home. Sound good?"

"Yessir!"

By the time Inko's walking in, takeout bags and suitcase in hand, Shouta's been roped into another rousing game of heroes and villains. Except the villains are invisible and Shouta and Izuku are both heroes.

It's unnecessarily confusing when Izuku changes the rules after months of playing it one way. Izuku insists, though, which is why Shouta is kicking at empty air while Izuku ducks beneath his legs and yells, "HIYAAA!" every few seconds.

He thinks that means they're winning.

Inko's face is full of devoted adoration as she looks at both of them. Shouta doesn't have time to cover his face when she whips out her phone to take pictures, so he sighs and submits to the mortifying ordeal of knowing this will end up framed somewhere in the apartment in the near future.

Izuku looks up when her phone's shutter clicks a third time, and he darts forward to wrap his arms around her waist. "MOM! LOOK AT WHAT MR. 'ZAWA GOT ME! I'M DRESSED JUST LIKE ERASERHEAD ISN'T THAT THE COOLEST EVER IT'S SO COOL!"

Inko gives him an indulgent smile and pats his head. "It sure is. I can't believe I'm lucky enough to have Eraserhead and Eraserbit here for dinner!"

Izuku's mouth drops open. "Eraserbit…" He turns starry-eyes to Shouta. "MR. 'ZAWA SHE SAID ERASERHEAD AND ERASERBIT! IT'S LIKE I'M YOUR SIDEKICK THAT'S SO COOL - "

"You came up with that name strangely fast," Shouta murmurs to Inko, who grins shamelessly back. "Had that in your back pocket for

awhile?”

“Maaaaybe.”

"What’s that even mean? Or did you just think it was cute?”

“It’s like. You know. When you use an eraser and there’s all the bits everywhere.”

“The shavings?”

“Yeah, the bits. Plus, it’s cute,” she admits unapologetically. She pats Izuku’s head, which stops his shouted stream of consciousness. “I picked up katsudon and cake - I’m sorry I didn’t make it for you this year. I thought I’d be able to get off work early today, but we have an audit coming up and the associates were panicking.”

“It’s okay!” he chirps. “Is the audit gonna be okay?”

“It’ll be annoying, but nothing Mama can’t handle.” She winks. “Get some plates for us while I change into something more comfortable?”

“Mmkay!”

Izuku runs off. The joy is a sharp contrast to the earlier despair. If it weren’t for the swollen nose, dried flecks of blood around his lips, and bandages, he’d look like any other kid excited for his special day.

If only.

“I’ll fill you in on what happened after he goes to bed. He’s alright for now, but - “ Shouta’s voice falters against his will. “He was saying some stuff that I’m concerned about. We might want to think seriously about getting him a counselor or therapist of some kind.”

Inko’s smile slides off her face. She says, “That’s. Probably not a bad idea.”

“Sorry. Not to bring down the mood immediately. But it was.” He struggles for words. “It was concerning. I didn’t think children knew how to hate themselves at such a young age.”

Inko’s breath hitches.

For a long moment, they stand in silence.

Then, Inko claps her hands together. Her brow furrows slightly in an

expression he associates with “Midoriya” and others would call determination. “We’ll figure it out. We’ll just love him extra hard until he can do it himself. For now, we’re celebrating the debut of Eraserbit and he’s going to open all of his gifts that have now been blown out of the water by yours.”

What a contrast from the despairing, hopeless woman this morning. If Shouta had ever wondered how Deku (and it’s harder than usual to say the name, even in the comfort of his mind, when Izuku was sobbing over it - now it’s tainted by guilt, loss, *and* a small boy’s sadness) had been so driven, he would’ve only had to see Inko’s strength to know where he inherited it from.

He says thoughtfully, “I dunno, the Water Hose action figures might - “

“Don’t pretend to be humble. It doesn’t suit you, mister.” She waggles a finger at him playfully.

Dinner is relatively normal. Izuku refuses to take off his scarf but is equally reluctant to risk getting it dirty. He’s quieter than normal due to the immense concentration eating carefully requires. Inko bemoans the associates at work that don’t know the differences between GDPR and APPI, and Izuku nods along seriously while Shouta pretends he has any idea what she’s talking about.

They’re just about to skip doing the dishes and go straight to letting Izuku open presents when Inko’s phone rings.

Inko pales. She fumbles for it, looks at the caller ID, and manages to pale further.

Shouta is violently reminded of the fact that he still hasn’t found any information on Izuku’s father. The father that only calls on holidays.

The father that’s calling right now.

izuku's birthday - pt.5

Chapter Summary

Incoming call from Hisashi Midoriya.

Chapter Notes

i really have the absolute sweetest readers??? you're all swell as hell. the bee's knees. just absolutely delightful all around. i hope you're all having a swell start to your week (considering i'm posting this at midnight and i have to be up in 6-ish hours, i'm gonna assume my week is going to be off to a sleepy start... wish me luck)

we're at the last chapter of izuku's birthday!!! the long-anticipated conversation between him and Mr. Dad~ i hope it lives up to the hype. this took me a little bit longer to post than i was planning because i finally have an idea of where i want the plot of this story to go and i wanted to make sure this lined up with that eventual goal.

(am i admitting in ch15, almost 40k into this, that i had no idea where i was taking this until literally 4 hours ago? you betcha. i've been absolutely BS-ing everything up until this point. i'm sorry if u all thought i had a master plan b/c i legit didn't until today!!! that's mainly why i haven't been answering any questions about the fic lmao. the plan i have now is cool though so it should be fine)

Inko spins to Izuku and says, “You can’t tell your father about Shouta. Understand?”

Izuku nods quickly.

“Okay. Don’t let him know that he’s on speaker either. I don’t want him knowing that Shouta and I are listening. I’ll point at you when it’s okay for you to talk. Okay?”

He nods again.

Inko looks at Shouta and says, “Don’t say anything. He doesn’t need to know you’re staying with us. Okay?”

Shouta gives her a serious thumbs up.

The ring before the call will go to voicemail, Inko picks up. She puts the call on speaker and places it gently on the table, with all the care of a bomb squad prying open the casing of their latest target.

As if it pains her, she softly says, “Hello?”

“Inko,” A deep voice says warmly. “It’s good to hear your voice. How are you, dear?”

“Just fine. You know how this time of year is - audits and budget reviews, all that fun stuff. And yourself?”

“I’m not as mobile as I’d like to be, but I’m doing better than last year. Izuku’s well?”

“Of course. His final exams were spectacular as always.”

“Good, good. If you’re alright with it, I’d like to speak with him and wish him a happy birthday…?”

Inko swallows. “Of course. Let me get him.”

She lets a few beats pass - more than Shouta would’ve had the patience to do - before she reluctantly gives Izuku a thumbs up.

Izuku tangles his fingers in his scarf and visibly steels himself. Then he says, “Hi Dad.”

“Izuku! Happy birthday buddy. You’re starting to get old, aren’tcha?”

“Just turned eight,” Izuku confirms. “I’ll be in double-digits soon! I learned how to multiply double digits since the last time we talked. It’s not that hard except remembering to add the extra zero when you gotta.”

“I was never very good at math - You must have received your talent for numbers from your mother. My elementary teachers bemoaned my ineptitude with long division.”

“Dividing’s harder. I haven’t figured that one out yet, but I’m gonna have to if I want to figure out how heroes split up where they patrol and how the Hero Commission determines how many heroes belong in an area ‘cause I think it’s based on how many people live in a city.”

There’s a pause. Then Hisashi says, faux casually, “So you’re still in your hero phase then?”

Izuku frowns. “I mean, I still admire heroes. I still want to be one. That won’t ever change. I think heroes are amazing and what they do is really really cool. But my definition of hero has changed since we last talked, so I don’t know if ‘still’ is the right word.”

“Really?” Hisashi sounds interested. Intrigued, even. “How so?”

“Did you know that Endeavor’s hurt almost as many civilians as he’s caught villains? And the district he works in regularly has had to increase taxes yearly for the last decade ‘cause of the property damage he causes? I don’t completely get what taxes *are* , exactly, but people are paying for him being careless and breaking things, and that’s not fair.

“Plus, his stats in regards to civilian lives and livelihoods left unaffected in the wake of villain attacks are significantly worse than not only All Might’s, but almost all of the other heroes in the top ten. And this is just stuff that people are talking about online - he’s one of the richest heroes so who knows what he was able to settle by paying for things before it was reported on.” Izuku’s frown deepens. “I don’t know. It seems bad to me. And if the number two hero, with the public’s eye on him more often than not, is doing that much damage and not being very heroic, then there’s probably others that are doing it too. And people praise him for it! He’s the second most popular hero! So I guess he’s a hero, but I don’t think he’s a good one or very heroic.”

“That’s remarkably astute, Izuku.” His voice is notably warmer. It sends prickles of unease through Shouta’s spine. “And you researched this all on your own?”

“Mmhm. And I still like heroes!” he adds quickly. “I just want to make sure I’m supporting actual heroes and not just the people who claim to be them.”

“Endeavor certainly is a piece of work. The Hero Commission does a spectacular job at making sure his worst traits are… glossed over in the public eye. It certainly tests your faith in the system, doesn’t it?”

“Mmhm. I don’t get why they’d lie. If someone’s doing stuff they shouldn’t, isn’t the commission supposed to stop them? What’s the point of the Hero Commission if it’s not making sure heroes are actually being heroes?” Izuku sighs heavily. “I don’t get it. We’re lucky that All Might’s the top hero and he’s actually a good hero, not like Endeavor.”

“I suppose I’m not free of your All Might adoration just yet then. I don’t suppose he has a terrible record like Endeavor hiding somewhere…?” Hisashi asks hopefully.

Izuku cheerily says, “Nope! I still like All Might and think he’s super cool but he’s not my favorite anymore. Did you know there’s heroes that don’t work for fame and money?”

“Mm? Are there now?”

“They’re called underground heroes,” he explains happily. At Inko and Shouta’s frantic hand motions, he rolls his eyes and mouths, “I know, I know,” like *they’re* the ones being ridiculous. “One of them saved me a few months ago when some kids were chasing me - they were really nice! I didn’t get their name, but they told me that I could be a hero! They were really cool, Dad!”

“An underground hero, hm?” Hisashi sounds amused. “I guess there’s worse role models to have. This one doesn’t wear red, yellow, and blue, does he?”

“Nope! That wouldn’t be very useful for underground heroes ‘cause they have to be discreet and blend in.”

“A step up already then. And you’re thinking critically about the hero system - I’m very proud of you, Izuku. It’s not easy to look at how things are and pick out what’s wrong with them. The hero system in particular - it’s been in place for so long that I don’t think many people in your generation can imagine what the world could be like without pro-heroes peddling out government propaganda. You’ve certainly matured since the last time we talked.”

Izuku says, “Well, it *has* been a year.”

Inko flinches. Shouta reaches over and grabs her hand, and she turns their grip around so she’s clutching his hand tightly.

Hisashi barks out a laugh. “Izuku, do you *want* me to call more often? After our last conversation, I would’ve thought once a year was plenty for you.”

“I like talking to you,” Izuku says honestly. “I don’t like when you’re mean just ‘cause you don’t like what I like. And I don’t like that you scare Mom. But there’s not many people that talk to me like what I say matters.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’m quirkless,” he says frankly. “I don’t know if Mom ever told you. I know I haven’t, so I guess I don’t know if you know or not since you’ve never said anything. But I’m quirkless, and people don’t like that. Kids at school are mean and the teachers don’t care. Kacchan is mean too. It won’t surprise me if you start being mean now that I told you.”

Inko might break his hand with how tight she’s holding it. Her eyes are wide.

The line is quiet.

Izuku adds, “If you’re going to be mean, you don’t have to call at all. I’d rather get no birthday call then have you be mean to me too.”

Shouta wonders how much more his heart can take before it shatters completely. The fact that mistreatment and cruelty is the norm - and that Izuku tends to accept that without any apparent resentment - is agonizing to be confronted with so frequently. To expect no support from his own father and presume abandonment as a preferable course of action…

Deku’s life could have so easily been more of a tragedy than it already was.

“First off, I didn’t know,” Hisashi finally says. “I’m sorry that I didn’t know. I should have. I’m your father. Even though I can’t be as involved in your life as I should be - as I want to be - I should be better about knowing what is going on with you when it’s something important. I will be better in the future at keeping tabs on you.

“Second - and Inko, I know you’re there, so pardon my language - I don’t give a damn whether you have a quirk or not. I care if you’re well and I care if you’re happy. Everything else is secondary, if even that.”

Izuku looks quite pleased, which is a painful contrast to the fear on Inko’s face. Shouta doesn’t know what to think or feel, but his heart’s beating strangely and he can feel sweat gathering at the base of his neck and the edges of his temples.

There’s something in Hisashi’s tone that, while warm, makes Shouta want to break Inko’s phone under his heel. Something about this conversation is setting off every instinct - every warning bell - that

he's honed in his time as a hero. His hand reflexively twitches towards his capture weapon.

“Third - “ here, his voice falters strangely. “Third, it was never my intention to scare your mother. I regret a great deal of how I treated her while we were in each other’s lives. I will not interfere with her life or how she raises you. Inko, you have no reason to take me at my word, but I *am* sorry for what happened. And I promise I will not approach you *or* Izuku - outside of if you require assistance at any point during his childhood. Even then, I doubt we'll have to see each other face-to-face for that interaction.”

Inko doesn’t say anything. Shouta has no clue what he would say if he was in her shoes. He squeezes her hand again for lack of any other way to show support.

“And I suppose I can stop making fun of heroes when we talk. Especially since your new favorite isn’t one of the glory hounds,” he says with a lighter voice. “Once again, you must have inherited the heroic gene from your mother. I’m not one for all of that ‘noble’ junk, you know.”

Izuku giggles.

“How about this - I haven’t sent your birthday gift yet. Tomorrow, I’ll go out and pick a basic cell phone for you, and maybe I can call a little more frequently or we can text every once in a while. Is that an acceptable gift?”

Inko abruptly stands up, her chair scraping against the floor. “No more than one call a month,” she says firmly. “Calls will be planned through text and on Izuku’s terms. No texting on weekdays or if Izuku has homework over the weekend. Izuku initiates the calls and texts - you do not. The only exception is if you need to reschedule a planned call due to a conflict or emergency. I will listen in on the calls when I feel it’s necessary, and I will read Izuku’s texts to you on a weekly basis. Understood?”

“Yes ma’am.” There’s a teasing note to his voice, and underneath that - longing. As if Inko barking out orders is something he’s missed.

Even knowing that Hisashi is dangerous, the aching tenderness in his tone is enough for Shouta to pity the man. It’s clear that, while their relationship may have been purely physical on Inko’s end, Hisashi has feelings for her that have yet to abate. At the very least, there's some amount of fondness and regret.

Shouta would still rip his throat out given the opportunity, but he can appreciate that the man knows what he's missing out on. He should regret how he treated her. He should regret that he'll never be allowed into her life in any meaningful capacity ever again.

“If you don’t follow these rules to a T, I will take a baseball bat to the phone myself.”

“Yes Inko.”

Inko turns and faces Izuku, who nods. “Yes Mama.”

She releases a hefty breath. “Fine. Nothing too fancy, Hisashi.”

“It will be a modest model, I promise.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“I love you, Izuku,” Hisashi says seriously. “If there’s nothing else you take from this conversation, then I need you to understand that much. Family is important to me. *You* are important to me.”

Izuku kicks his feet lightly. “I dunno if I love you,” he says bluntly. “We don’t talk often enough for me to tell. But I’d like to.”

Hisashi laughs loudly, supremely unconcerned with such a harsh announcement. “Ah, children and their brutal honesty. For all of your maturity, you *are* still just a boy. I almost forgot with how serious this conversation became. I appreciate it, Izuku. Let’s see if I can change that answer by next year, hm?”

Izuku makes a noise that isn’t quite assent, but it’s not discouraging either.

Hisashi laughs again. “Alright son. I’ll let you go and enjoy the rest of your birthday. Goodbye for now.”

“Bye Dad.”

Izuku hangs up. Inko makes no move to take the phone back, staring blankly at it and biting her lip. Shouta’s hand is still gripped in hers.

Izuku gives them both a big smile, appearing not to notice their tense shoulders. “I guess he doesn’t hate me! I was even trying to be rude and he didn’t seem mad. I thought he didn’t like me, but it sounded like things were okay and he even apologized to you Mama!”

Inko gives him a weak smile. “Yeah baby. It went well. I’m glad you’re happy.”

The rest of the night is a blur of Izuku’s normal chattering and Inko’s attempts to continue like the call didn’t happen.

She doesn’t seem overly distressed - if anything, she seems more relaxed than she did before the call. Maybe Hisashi’s apology means something to her, even if it doesn’t make up for what he put her through. Maybe she’s reassured by the way he indicated he has no plans to attempt to take Izuku from her care. Maybe, despite everything, it’s better to know that a potentially dangerous man is on their side rather than acting against them.

Shouta, admittedly, zones out. The day has been longer than he ever expected it to be and more emotionally trying than he was equipped to handle. All he wants is to crawl into bed and sleep for as long as he can get away with.

Yet -

After Izuku hugs him goodnight, after he tells Inko about the situation after school and Izuku’s instinctive self-deprecating comments, after he brushes his teeth and settles in for the night - he can’t sleep. He hasn’t had a full night’s sleep in a week, and still, his brain can’t stop turning Izuku’s conversation with Hisashi over and over in his head.

“I know that voice,” Shouta murmurs to the ceiling. “I know it. I’ve heard him before.”

But Hell if he can figure out when he would have heard Hisashi Midoriya speak before.

glittery ideals and sparkling principles

Chapter Summary

Glitter and an odd stranger.

Chapter Notes

i'm laughing so hard because the comments from last chapter were 50% "aizawa the fuck u don't remember the Biggest Baddest Supervillain's voice??" and 50% "if dad for one even LOOKS at izuku the wrong way dadzawa better rip his spine out" and honestly i'm living for it all. glad that i toed the line of "this is a creepy creep" just enough~

and!!! we're finally done with izuku's birthday arc!!! onto the next~ i'm thinking we'll have a short summer arc, then into the next school year for izuku which will come with it's own drama...

thank you all for your support and kind comments!!! it makes me crazy excited to work on this fic knowing that you're enjoying it so much. i hope i continue to provide the dadzawa and cute izuku content that everyone wants <3

Hizashi returns from his retreat a week after Izuku's birthday. A few days later, he texts Shouta asking when he can meet the Midoriya family, "plz send more pics of izuku dressed like u b/c i'm gonna DIE its so fking cute shouta plz plz plz," and "what can i bring for dinner does the little listener like chocolate what about strawberry."

"Of course he can come over," Inko says dismissively when he hesitantly brings it up. "It's your home too, and I know you wouldn't bring anyone untoward - "

"Untoward?" he snorts.

"Or who would put us in danger," she continues without missing a beat. "If you trust your friend, I trust him."

"Are you sure?" Shouta presses. "I've told you that he's been struggling recently. And you said you're going out tonight, so it'd just be us and Izuku. I can ask him if he can reschedule if you're not comfortable."

Inko finishes off the rest of her coffee, tipping her mug back to get

every last drop. When she puts it down, she couples it with a dry, deadpan look. “Shouta, I trust you. If you think he is safe for Izuku to be around, then I trust your judgement and he’s more than welcome here. He clearly means a lot to you which I’m assuming means I’ll meet him sooner or later anyway.”

Shouta shrugs. “He’s been wanting to meet you two for awhile. I doubt I’d be able to keep him away now.”

“I’m curious to meet him. After seeing Nemuri, I’ll admit to being curious about the kind of friends you attract.”

“Nemuri’s an outlier. Hizashi’s annoying but not the way Nemuri is.”

“Nemuri’s cute,” Inko protests. “She’s got spirit. If I wasn’t worried about Izuku’s curiosity being turned in… inappropriate directions, I’d have invited her to hang out over here instead of going out tonight.”

Shouta sips his coffee. “And you want an excuse to drink for once.”

Inko giggles and winks. “Maybe just a little bit. She seems like she’s fun to drink with, and I haven’t had a chance to really let go since Izuku was born. Now that I have a live-in babysitter though…”

He deadpans, “I see how it is. When you want something from me, I’m ‘family,’ but once you get it, I’m just the nanny.”

She leans over to ruffle his hair teasingly. “Now you’re getting it. I’ll let you know when I’m on my way home. Text me if you need anything, but I think you know how to handle Izuku better than I do these days.”

“Untrue. Not even a pro-hero can handle the monster under the bed the way his precious Mama can.”

In Izuku’s defense, Shouta would trust Inko to chase away nightmares more than himself. He’s had his own fair share of sleepless nights where Inko’s quiet company soothed him better than any sleeping pills ever could.

Inko leaves for work, dressed a little more casually than she normally would due to the plans she has for later that night. Shouta hopes that she and Nemuri have a nice time - both would benefit from a friendship that isn’t tied to their respective responsibilities. He and Inko have a good friendship, but Shouta’s uncomfortably aware of the fact that more and more of their conversations are surrounding Izuku.

With Overhaul's arrest out of the way and most of his independent investigations at a standstill, Shouta thought it might be beneficial to take the rest of July and August off of work. It'd give him some time to step back from his open cases and return with a fresh set of eyes later while also keeping Izuku from having to go to a daycare or camp for his summer break. The relief on both Midoriyas' faces when he made the offer cinched his decision, and most of his clients and contacts gave him a pat on the back for taking his first vacation since he joined the workforce.

It's strange to not be working at all. He can sleep for as long as he wants and the only responsibility he has is to keep Izuku fed and from getting too bored.

The first time around, most of his adult life was spent with him working at least two jobs. Taking time off meant he would have to think about things and feelings he didn't want to deal with, which led to him never taking a vacation if he had a say in the matter. After Shigaraki took control of Japan, breaks were a luxury none of them could afford.

Despite his natural tendency to be a workaholic, it feels right to take a break now. Even if it feels selfish and makes him anxious to sit still, Shouta wants to enjoy the time he has before he starts deliberately making changes to the future again. Izuku, too, will benefit from consistent positive attention - something he clearly needs, if the emotional mess that was his birthday is anything to go by.

Already a week in has done wonders for Izuku, who comes bounding out of his room every morning and clings to Shouta's waist to talk about whatever theory has gotten itself lodged into his head for the day. Shouta's taken to suggesting articles for him to read when he gets too deep into asking why the hero system functions the way it does.

It shouldn't be as cute as it is to listen to an eight-year-old chew on pancakes while talking about the merits of regular de-escalation training and shifting government peacekeeping funding to a less unilateral approach. If Shouta didn't know that Izuku's quirk was going to be a devastatingly self-destructive muscle-enhancing one, he'd think the kid had an intelligence quirk like Nedzu.

As it is, Shouta's had to brush up on quirk theory and hero-related legislation to keep up with Izuku's thought processes.

Like most kids, his issue with remaining logical and thoughtful on

discussions like this tends to come back to emotion. If Izuku gets too excited about a specific hero, he struggles to apply the concepts he's learning about to that hero in particular.

See: All Might.

It's hard for him to think that All Might would ever be anything except the epitome of perfection, and it's only made harder by the fact that it's a rare occurrence to see any anti-All Might content on the forums Izuku frequents. Not that All Might isn't a great hero - he is, of course. But Izuku treats him like an exception, and he tends to blow off the property damage he causes while holding heroes like Endeavor accountable for theirs.

And, though Shouta tries to convince him otherwise - Eraserhead is a blind spot for him as well.

It's weird to have Izuku place his hero persona onto a pedestal that is already occupied by All Might. Especially when Izuku says things like, "But you wouldn't do that," or, "But Eraserhead is the coolest and wouldn't be mean to a villain just 'cause they were bad, right?" and Shouta knows damn well it's a series of sentiments that will play on repeat during his next patrol.

Maybe his decision to take a vacation has just as much to do with his own guilty conscience over the Overhaul operation as it does with wanting to keep Izuku safe. Maybe Izuku's high standards are causing a crisis and making him wonder if he is a good hero or not.

Does he need to be a good hero, though, to save the future?

If he can kill Shigaraki before he becomes a threat - isn't it worth betraying his principles to save Izuku from having to bear the burden later?

Shouta doesn't know.

The image of Chisaki's bloody, pained face is overwritten by Izuku's appearance. His hair - always a mess in the morning - is combed and as tamed as it ever gets. He's already dressed in jeans and a bright red t-shirt, gray scarf already wrapped tightly around his neck - he's barely taken it off since he received it, resulting in a mandatory "you have to take it off for laundry day or else" rule - and he's carrying one of his new notebooks that's already filling up with analyses of heroes. This one has also started covering statistics regarding civilians, approval polls, and damage done after heroes' debuts.

He doesn't think he can handle their normal discussions today. He doesn't want to be a hero or think about heroes today.

Half on a whim and half to avoid the guilt he's not ready to face, Shouta says, "What do you say to taking a break from training and hero junk today? We can do whatever you want if it doesn't have anything to do with heroes. Name it."

Izuku cocks his head to the side but obediently closes his notebook. He asks, "Are you okay, Mr. 'Zawa? You look tired."

"I'm fine, kid. I just thought it'd be nice to switch things up for once."

Izuku doesn't look convinced.

"Hizashi's coming over later. Are you going to make him a card? Maybe that can be our activity for the day," he mutters thoughtfully. "You want to go to the art store? Get some new markers, a highlighter for your notes… I could use some push pins, maybe pick up another whiteboard…"

"Oh! Does that mean Hizashi's all better now?" Izuku asks excitedly. "You said he couldn't come over 'cause he was sick but if he's coming over - That's great, Mr. 'Zawa!"

"More or less," Shouta agrees. He knows that addiction isn't exactly a one-and-done kind of illness, but last time Hizashi quit drinking cold turkey when his agency more or less forced him to take the U.A. teaching job. He didn't drink another drop after that for as long as Shouta knew him for. With an actual support system and multiple health professionals on his side, he isn't nearly as worried about Hizashi as he was the first time around. "He likes the cards you make him. I know for a fact he keeps one in his wallet. He's probably just as excited to meet you as you are to meet him, though I have no idea why either of you is getting so worked up about it."

"He's your friend," Izuku insists. "That's really exciting! You're nice and Miss Kayama was nice even if she was kinda weird, so he's probably nice too."

"He is. He'll be thrilled to get a 'congrats on not dying' card instead of the usual 'get well' one."

Izuku giggles.

He giggles at the art store too when Shouta catches him trying to

sneak a gallon jug of glitter into their cart. He's not quite old enough to understand subtlety, thankfully, or else Shouta would've been stuck with way more All Might-themed glitter and confetti than, realistically, should be allowed to exist.

"No way," Shouta says. He picks the jug up and puts it back on the shelf. "That'll get everywhere."

"But Mr. 'Zawa!" Izuku protests. "We're celebrating! How are we supposed to celebrate without confetti and glitter and party stuff!"

"If we didn't need confetti and glitter for your birthday, we don't need it for Hizashi visiting."

"Mr. 'Zawa, pleeeeeeeeeeeease?"

Shouta looks at Izuku, who's staring at him with wide eyes and his hands clasped together in a begging motion. He looks at the shelves, at their cart, and at Izuku once more.

Izuku's lower lip trembles ever-so-slightly.

He sighs. Resigns himself to Inko shooting him nasty glares as they inevitably have to spend weeks trying to clean sparkly bullshit out of their carpet.

"You're a menace," he accuses. "Not that much. We don't need a gallon. Get like, I dunno - here, this size." He points at a small sachet of silver and black glitter. "And not the All Might one. This will somehow end up in my hair by the end of whatever you're planning with it, and I refuse to be stuck looking like I showered in his sparkling smile's dandruff."

This earns him another giggle and a chirped, "Thank you Mr. 'Zawa!", followed by Izuku darting off to ogle at the other colors.

Shouta grabs a stack of construction paper and some glue, keeping half an eye on Izuku while doing so. His split attention is the only explanation he has for why he ends up hitting another cart with his own - he didn't see it coming down the aisle or the person behind it.

In front of him is a generic businessman pushing a cart full of what appears to be random junk. He's collected a few skeins of yarn, scrapbooking supplies, a few jugs of resin, and what appears to be a collection of books about candlemaking. An eclectic bunch, but Shouta's cart is half filled with office supplies like push pins and

staples, half filled with things for a children to draw with, so he doesn't have much room to judge.

Mr. Generic-Businessman has a face that looks like it was cultivated to be as forgettable as possible. There's nothing remarkable about him at all. Shouta's almost jealous - with a face like that, undercover work would be a cinch.

"Sorry," Shouta belatedly apologizes. He pulls his cart back and moves to let the man pass.

Mr. Generic-Businessman clearly has no intention to consider Shouta's, "don't talk to me, don't look at me, leave me the fuck alone" body language as any sort of deterrent. He cheerily says, "Oh no, it was my fault! I wasn't looking where I was going. Lost in thought, you know?"

Shouta grunts. It's a carefully calculated grunt to indicate neither agreement or disagreement that he had to learn early-on in his friendship with Nemuri.

"What brings you here today?" the man asks, still much more cheery than he has any right to be. "Going off of your cart - decorating a home office, perhaps?"

Before Shouta can find a polite way to say, "Mind your own fucking business, weirdo," Izuku comes hurtling back and is holding up two packets of glitter with an extremely triumphant smile.

"Mr. 'Zawa look at how PRETTY these are can I please get both I know you only said one but the pink and gold will look really good together and it'll be really really pretty on top of orange paper please - "

"Yes, sure, fine."

Izuku downright squeals in delight as he carefully places his chosen treasures into the cart. Shouta wishes that everyone was as thrilled by fifty-cent crap as little kids are.

"Ah, picking up stuff for the kiddo then?" The unwelcome man asks indulgently. "You have a very handsome son there - My son's around the same age. Has the same freckles, even. You're a lucky father to have one so well-behaved, too."

Shouta's heart jolts against his will at the assumption. In the same moment, Izuku visibly startles and steps back closer to Shouta,

grabbing onto his belt loop suddenly and half hiding behind him. His focus on his “pretty” find must have left him blind to the man’s presence.

Observational awareness is something they can and should start working on. It’s almost concerning how lost in thought Izuku can get if he’s interested in something enough.

Shouta steadies Izuku with a hand on his back and says blandly, “He’s not my son. But thanks. He’s a good kid.”

“I guess it’s obvious you’re not directly related - not with freckles like that. He *is* a very handsome young man.” At that, he leans down slightly to smile at Izuku. Izuku gives a shy smile back, and the man’s smile widens as he reaches out to ruffle Izuku’s hair. “Is he your nephew then? Or stepson?”

“Something like that,” he responds noncommittally, pulling Izuku away with an arm around his shoulder. “If you’ll excuse us.”

Whether he will or not, Shouta’s had enough of this strange conversation. He feels like a cat that’s been pet in the wrong direction, like there’s a tiny fly that landed somewhere on him and he can’t figure out where to swat at it - something’s off, even if he can’t put his finger on it.

He tugs Izuku closer and marches them to the checkout, pointedly not looking back at the man that watches them leave with a strange sort of indulgence.

Izuku says, “Mr. ‘Zawa, what’s a stepson?”

“If your mom marries another man, that would be your stepdad and you would be his stepson.”

Izuku’s brow furrows. “Are you gonna marry mom?”

“Absolutely not.”

“How come?”

“I wouldn’t marry any woman. If I was going to marry someone, they would be a man.”

Izuku’s face makes an “oh” of comprehension. “So you’re not gonna be my stepdad.”

“Nope. Sorry kid.”

“Are you going to marry anyone?”

“Probably not.”

“Why?”

“I’d have to date someone first, and I’m too busy for that. I have more important things to do, like making sure you don’t inhale too much glue and glitter while making Hizashi’s card.”

“If you did marry someone, would they come live with us too?”

Shouta shrugs. “Dunno. Depends on if you and your mom ever decide you’re sick of me sticking around.”

Izuku jolts and stares up at him with wide eyes. In the next moment, he throws his arms around Shouta’s waist and squeezes as hard as an eight-year-old can. “Mr. ‘Zawa I don’t want you to leave *ever* !”

“Even when I eat the last pack of gummies?”

“You can have all of the gummies if you promise you won’t leave!”

Aw.

Shouta pats Izuku’s head and says, “That’s alright, ‘Zuku, I don’t need gummies to stay. It’s more fun sharing them anyway.”

Izuku holds his hand the entire way home, which makes carrying their supplies a little difficult. Shouta doesn’t really mind, even if it strains his back to have to lean over some.

love is homemade cards and hero merch

Chapter Summary

Hizashi visits. It pretty much goes as expected.

Chapter Notes

comments after ch15 - "wow afo what a creep"
comments after ch16 - "WOW AFO WHAT A FUCKING CREEP"

u guys are the best. i'm not confirming or denying that the creep from last chapter was afo or aligned with him. you'll have to keep reading! (mwahahaha)

in all seriousness though: you are all legitimately great. thank you for being such involved readers and enjoying my fic - i am really lucky to have so many kind people saying kind things about something i started for fun <3

this chapter is pretty much pure fluff. hizashi is pure sunshine and aizawa is the cat who likes to nap in his warmth

Because a card is apparently not enough, Izuku spends most of the afternoon making Shouta staple construction paper together to make a “Congratulations!” banner. Shouta said he’d only do it if Izuku could spell “Congratulations” without his help, momentarily forgetting that Izuku is *way* smarter than any eight-year-old should be.

In his defense, it’s easy to forget when he’s looking at a kid who accidentally glued a crayon to the back of his hand.

(There were more than a few tears as Shouta patiently removed glue from his skin. A mid-afternoon cuddle was apparently necessary for Izuku’s continued health after such a traumatic experience. Shouta thinks it was more the shock than actual pain, considering Izuku isn't one to whine about normal bumps and bruises.)

Shouta has barely finished hanging the banner up, Izuku’s cries of, “It’s lopsided, move it to the left - wait, I meant right - no, left - um, higher?” finally satisfied, when there’s a knock at the door. Izuku, who had been impatiently staring at the door, runs in the opposite direction for who-knows-what reason.

“Aren’t you going to get the door? You’ve been bouncing off the walls

all day.”

Izuku flings himself at Shouta’s midsection and buries his face in Shouta’s stomach.

“You’re getting shy now? Hizashi’s a giant dork, don’t worry.”

“What if he doesn’t like me?”

“Literally impossible,” Shouta says immediately. He starts walking towards the door and ignores Izuku’s dragging feet that attempt to slow him down. “As mentioned, he’s a giant dork. You’re also a giant dork. You’ll get along great.”

“Mr. ‘Zawa - “

Shouta opens the front door without any more fanfare and says, “Get in before the neighbors see you.”

It’s a good thing he spoke before actually looking at Hizashi or else there would’ve been a very long, awkward pause as Shouta took in what he was seeing.

After months of meeting over coffee, Shouta was used to seeing his friend look like roadkill. Exhausted, hungover, poorly-dressed roadkill. And not that Hizashi wasn’t still handsome even then - he’s as popular and famous as he is for many reasons, and his looks are one of them - but there’s a difference between a man clawing his way out of his own filth to make it to a social engagement that wouldn’t be softened and eased by drinking and a man who, apparently, wants to make a good impression.

Hizashi’s hair is sleek and flowing down his back, only the front tied back to stay out of his face. He’s clean-shaven, dressed in tight jeans and a black button-down that’s rolled up at the sleeves. He’s grinning brightly and carrying two large boxes in his arms.

Shouta’s mouth is dry.

Hizashi’s grin widens like he knows a secret, but he just muscles past Shouta and says, “C’mon, Shouta, I dressed down so I wouldn’t intimidate any old ladies that may be lurking around your happy suburban place. After all, this seems like the idyllic neighborhood for retirees… Or maybe it’s a more of a place for growing little heroes who may or may not have just had a birthday recently~”

He nudges the door closed as Hizashi gives Izuku an exaggerated wink. Izuku's death grip on him loosens slightly and he gives Hizashi a small, shy smile.

Shouta's still trying to figure out how to breathe again. He somehow manages to choke out, "Izuku, this is obviously Hizashi Yamada. Hizashi, if you can't figure out who the small kid is after months of me telling you about him, you should have your license revoked."

"Hi Mr. Yamada," Izuku mumbles politely. "It's nice to meet you."

Hizashi beams and carefully puts both boxes on the kitchen counter. He then spins around and crouches until he's at eye-level with Izuku. "You too! It's great to finally meet the artist behind the beautiful cards I was receiving. They were really helpful during my recovery."

Izuku hides his face in Shouta's hip, already flushing red. In return, Hizashi lets out an almost inaudible, "Aw~" and Shouta has to roll his eyes at the absolutely enraptured look Hizashi is giving the poor kid.

"He's acting all shy like he didn't spend all afternoon making that for you," Shouta says dryly, pointing behind Hizashi into the living room. "There's tissues in the bathroom if you need them."

Hizashi starts to say, "Wha - " as he turns around, but he cuts himself off by choking on his own spit.

The glittery monstrosity is terrifyingly terrific. Pink, gold, orange, and teal - not a combination most would call "pretty," but Izuku had insisted it was the only combination that would do. It's childish, with no real rhyme or reason to the pictures and some letters in "Congratulations" bigger than others. At Izuku's request, Shouta had drawn a single black cat in a corner, and Izuku drew bunnies, birds, and what might have been intended to be a panda around it.

It's hideous, and as Shouta expected, it makes Hizashi tear up almost immediately.

"Izu-chaaaan," he wails, spinning around. Izuku's staring at the ground, flushing a deeper red, and Hizashi darts over to hug him tightly. Spinning him around like he's a child with his favorite teddy bear, he sobs, "You're such a SWEETHEART I can't HANDLE IT!" while Izuku shrieks with laughter.

"Watch your quirk," Shouta berates him. "Tiny child ears don't need you blowing out their eardrums."

Izuku gasps and wriggles in Hizashi's grip excitedly. "Mr. Yamada, is your quirk a voice quirk? What does your quirk do? Can you really blow out eardrums? Does that hurt? Is it hard to do?"

Hizashi sniffles into Izuku's hair, still emotional. "Uh-huh. My quirk's just called Voice - real original, I know - and I can make my voice really loud. It hurts a lot to get your eardrums messed up so I try not to, but it's not hard to do."

Shouta has a perfect view of the way Izuku's eyes immediately narrow in suspicion. His eyes dart up at Hizashi, who has yet to finish crying, and then over to Shouta who keeps his face purposefully blank. He mutters, "A quirk… just like Present Mic's?"

"Did I forget to tell you?" Shouta says casually. "My bad. Hizashi's a hero too."

Izuku stares at Shouta. "He's - Your best friend is PRESENT MIC?!"

"Whoops," he says un-apologetically.

"You didn't tell him?!" Hizashi asks incredulously. He finally puts Izuku down and wipes at his eyes quickly. "Dude. You told me how much of a fanboy he is and you didn't warn him?"

Shouta shrugs. "Surprise."

Izuku makes a noise like a dying whale. If Inko were here, she'd probably have tried to take a picture of him. "MR. 'ZAWA I'VE BEEN MAKING CARDS FOR *PRESENT MIC* THIS ENTIRE TIME?!" He quickly spins to face Hizashi and bows low. "MR. PRESENT MIC YOU'RE REALLY COOL AND YOUR QUIRK IS COOL AND I'M SORRY I MADE A BUNCH OF ERASERHEAD CARDS FOR YOU IF I HAD KNOWN IT WAS YOU I WOULD'VE PUT MUSIC NOTES OR SOMETHING BUT I LISTEN TO YOUR RADIO SHOW ALL THE TIME AND AND AND - "

"Breathe, kid."

Izuku takes in a heaving breath. Hizashi, rather than looking intimidated like Nemuri did when Izuku word-vomited on her, is looking more and more smitten by the second. Shouta has to hide his smile behind his capture weapon.

"Little listener, I loved all of the cards you sent me!" he protests immediately. "Especially the Eraserhead ones! After all, he's my favorite hero too."

“He’s the coolest!” Izuku agrees.

Shouta proceeds to bury his face further into his capture weapon. “Stop that.”

“But, anyway - “ Hizashi picks up one of the boxes off of the counter - the one covered in newspaper that looks like it’s bigger than two Izukus - and walks over to Izuku, sitting down on the floor with the box. He pats the ground next to him expectantly and waits for the kid to sit - then he looks at Shouta even more expectantly until, with a sigh, Shouta sits down across from them. “I really really REALLY appreciate the cards. I’ve hung a bunch of them up on my fridge because they’re so pretty! But more than the cards, I especially appreciate that you’ve been taking such good care of ol’ Eraser over there. You and your mom make him really happy, you know,” Hizashi says earnestly.

Izuku shakes his head frantically. “N-no, I m-mean! Mr. ‘Zawa’s the best! He’s really nice and he makes Mama feel safe and I feel safe and he’s been teaching me how to kick stuff and helps me with my homework - I don’t do much of anything for him.”

“You’ll get it someday,” Hizashi says certainly, unbothered by the dismissal. “But for now, trust me: You do plenty. Just keep on being you, little listener. You’re something special.”

Before Izuku can protest further or Shouta can swallow past the lump in his throat, Hizashi shoves the box forward and says loudly, “Now, more importantly! I apparently missed your birthday, which is a *huge* tragedy. So happy belated birthday, Izu-chan! I hope you like it and don’t mind that I want the world to know you’re one of MY fans, mm-kay?”

“You got me a gift?” Izuku asks in confusion. He looks at the box, then up at Hizashi and Shouta, clearly bewildered. “But we just met?”

“We hadn’t even met when you were sending me all of the cards,” Hizashi points out patiently, like he was prepared for an argument. “You’re important to Shouta, so that means you’re important to me. I’m sure it’s the same for you, right?”

Izuku’s eyes light up with understanding. “Oh! I see. Thank you, Mr. Yamada!”

“He’s polite too,” Hizashi says dramatically, covering his face with an arm. “You’ve picked up the perfect kid, Shou, really.”

Shouta says, “Get your own.”

Izuku’s already finished tearing the paper off of his present by the time their “banter” (if Shouta had more energy, he’d call it what it is: Hizashi whining while Shouta shuts him down) winds to a close. He pulls the lid off and has to push through a veritable mountain of tissue paper -

“You splurged on tissue paper but wrapped it in newspaper?” Shouta mutters incredulously.

Hizashi hisses back, “I wanted it to be a surprise!” like that makes any sense whatsoever.

Izuku squeaks. “Mr. Yamada, i-is this - ?”

He pulls out the first of what appears to be many clothing items. It looks like it’s a pair of Present Mic branded pajama pants - Shouta had a pair just like it in the future. They were his favorite to wear on a lazy Sunday since they were a light jersey material rather than the fleecy kind branded pajamas tend to be and the accents matched almost perfectly with the yellow on his sleeping bag.

Shouta peeks into the box and sees there’s at least a dozen shirts, a jacket that’s way too big for Izuku but clearly meant to be a replica of Mic’s own, a reusable water bottle, and a bunch of other junk that Shouta just knows is going to be left on the floor for him to step on in the middle of the night sooner or later.

Izuku’s staring at Hizashi with starry eyes. “This is the - the Superstar line! It’s not supposed to come out for another year! It even has the keychain - “ he pulls out a dinky little thing that looks like a faux-realistic microphone with Present Mic’s obnoxious yellow signature on it. “And they said they’d only make a hundred of them!”

“Don’t tell anyone, but there’s actually a hundred-and-one,” Hizashi whispers conspiratorially while pointing to the serial number. “I asked my people to make an extra special one for my favorite fan to keep with him always, so you have lucky number one-oh-one. Special edition, yeah?”

Izuku might actually faint. Shouta discreetly pulls out his phone to take a picture of his gobsmacked face, knowing Inko will be devastated to have missed such an exciting moment for her son.

“Are you going to try some of it on?” Shouta asks blandly. “May as

well see if it all fits."

That sends Izuku sprinting to his bedroom with arms full of merch, debating out loud what to wear first.

The minute they're alone, Hizashi spins to face Shouta and says in a broken tone, "He's so SWEET holy shit Shouta I might start crying again how is he such a sweetheart??"

"He's a good kid," Shouta agrees.

"Is his quirk being endearing? Is it the puppy eyes? I literally can't come up with any other explanation for how he's so adorable - "

"Oh," Shouta says. He hums and taps a finger against his lips. "I was messing with Izuku when I said this, but I mean it this time - I really thought I told you, but. Uh. Izuku's quirkless."

Hizashi's eyebrows raise so quickly that Shouta's surprised they remained on his face.

Shouta tries to think back on their conversations over coffee, convinced he would've mentioned this at some point. He knows he brought up the bullying and how the teachers at the middle school are terrible -

But Hizashi had never asked about Izuku's quirk before, so Shouta never brought it up. It feels like a lie every time he says, "Izuku's quirkless," when he knows that the boy's just an unprecedented late bloomer. He avoids saying it, feeling terrible that he can't stop the discrimination that Izuku faces or at least give Inko some comfort that Izuku isn't going to always be as defenseless as she thinks he is.

How would he explain that he knew Izuku would have a quirk someday if doctors, apparently, hadn't predicted that Deku would manifest any power?

"Are you serious?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"You're training a quirkless kid to eventually be a hero," Hizashi says slowly. Disbelievingly.

Shouta immediately scowls and snaps "If you're going to be an ass about it, I will kick you out of here in a goddamn heartbeat Hizashi

Yamada, I swear to fucking - “

“Not what I meant!” he says quickly, making an “X” with his arms. “Sorry, sorry. Didn’t mean it to sound that way. I just. I wouldn’t have expected that of you, Mr. ‘Why Do So Many Potential-less Wannabes Try To Be Heroes When They’re Just Pathetic Losers With Shitty Quirks.’ You ragged on tons of people during school for having ‘non-heroic’ quirks.”

“I ragged on people who were assholes and I hit where I knew it’d hurt,” Shouta corrects. “Plenty of people ragged on me first for having a ‘villainous’ quirk, you know. Everyone in high school is a bit of a douchebag, me included, so I probably did say some nasty garbage that I don’t agree with now. I’m not going to apologize though when most of the people I said would wash out did, in fact, wash out.”

“Harsh.”

“Look,” he sighs. “I don’t remember what shit I said in high school. Now, though, I don’t give a damn what quirk, if any, anyone has. If people are willing to put the work in, anyone can be a hero. Izuku’s a damn good kid who works his tiny ass off in everything he does. He’s sharper and smarter than any kid I’ve met, and he has so much potential to do good in the world. Quirk or no quirk, he’s definitely going to be a hero.”

Hizashi gives him an unreadable look. There’s something in his eyes that normally is only seen on the battlefield or when he’s called in to consult on a case. He’s sharper than the media gives him credit for - Shouta knows that better than anyone else. He slowly says, “You’ve changed a lot in the past year, you know. It’s not a bad thing, but. It’s kinda wild.”

Shouta scoffs, internally and externally. Now that he’s not drowning in peach Schnapps and rave music, it’s not a surprise that Hizashi’s noticed post-high school Shouta is not the same Shouta sat in front of him. He should’ve prepared for it.

The important thing, though -

“Just promise you’re not going to be a jerk to Izuku for being quirkless,” he demands.

“What kind of guy do you take me for? Should I be offended that you think I’m a bigot?” Hizashi demands back. “Fuck off. He’s adorable and I’m going to steal him from you the first chance I get. And I’ll be

his number one fan the minute he goes pro because I know damn well you won't wear any of his merch no matter how much you love him."

Izuku comes running out of his room clad in two t-shirts, pajama pants, the oversized leather jacket, and his gray scarf, saving Shouta from having to answer. Hizashi gushes over Izuku, who struts around and gives a mini fashion show, while Shouta clutches at his chest and thinks, "Oh, I guess I do."

Then he thinks, "He's right though. I won't wear any of those hideous green bunny ears, though. I'll tolerate a keychain at *most* ."

'zuku, 'zawa, and 'zashi

Chapter Summary

Hizashi's visit continues, and Shouta gets a surprising call.

Chapter Notes

ok ngl i have not even CONSIDERED what izuku's hero costume will look like in this fic and so many of you made comments about "oh there probably won't be any bunny ears this time since that was an all might tribute lol" and i'm like???? i mean ur RIGHT but i didn't think about it??????? so i guess i know what i'm going to be spending my entire work day tomorrow thinking about instead of doing actual work

additionally! a few people were wondering if i was going to do a time skip at any point or nah. and i'd like to say "tentatively yes, but not any time soon" - there's a lot that has to happen pre-UA years to set up for hero school years, so it'll be awhile until we get there.

as always: thank you thank you thank you for reading and commenting and enjoying <3 i'm incredibly grateful for all of your support!!

Hizashi is incredibly good with Izuku. He's patient with Izuku's rambling and more than happy to partake in his sillier thought exercises. He is absolutely *delighted* to be invited to play heroes and villains while Shouta cleans up after dinner, and he shrieks almost as loud as Izuku does when he catches the kid and lightly tackles him to the ground for a tickle attack.

Shouta would never stoop so low as to tickle a fallen enemy, but Hizashi has no such qualms. They're lucky that Izuku is so forgiving and kind even to evil madmen that take advantage of squishy little tummies.

"Mr. Y-yamadaaAA!"

"Nope!" Hizashi presses a thumb against Izuku's forehead and scrubs. "It's Hizashi! Uncle Hizashi if you want, but Hi-za-shi!"

"You're an adult!" Izuku nearly wails. "I can't!"

“It’s true,” Shouta calls out. “I’ve only been living with them for, what, half a year now? A little more? And I’m still Mr. Aizawa.”

“You’re Mr. ‘Zawa,” Hizashi corrects with a playful pout. He sits up and pulls Izuku into his lap, hugging him so they’re sitting back-to-chest. “That’s like a nickname! I want one too. C’mon, ‘Zuku-chan～”

Izuku’s eyes light up and he claps his hands together once. “Okay, well - Mr. ‘Zawa sometimes calls me ‘Zuku like that, and you have a ‘Z’ too! So you can be Mr. ‘Zashi. ‘Zuku, Mr. ‘Zawa, and Mr. ‘Zashi!” He tilts his head so he can look at Hizashi and asks hesitantly, “Is that okay?”

Hizashi dramatically clutches his chest. “Too cute,” he murmurs. “Too goddamn cute. How?”

“Watch your language,” Shouta chides.

“It’s perfect!” he finally declares, ignoring Shouta completely. “Thank you, ‘Zuku-chan!”

Izuku pokes him authoritatively until Hizashi loosens his hold. He pouts. “Can we get back to playing now?”

“I cannot POSSIBLY say no to that adorable face.”

Shouta goes back to washing dishes when the sounds of their playing continue. The sink running covers up the majority of their words, so he only hears a handful of squeals and shrieks as he scrubs furiously at their plates. He rushes through it, leaving the dishes over the stove to dry instead of putting them away right away.

He never thought that Hizashi meeting Izuku would go poorly, seeing as the man’s a child himself and is one of the few spotlight heroes that has a heart of gold. Hizashi was always going to be good with Izuku and had already adored the kid just through what Shouta told him about Izuku.

That being said: he hadn’t thought that Izuku would warm up to him so quickly. He should’ve, considering the fact that Izuku soaks up basic human decency like a sponge, but he thought that Hizashi’s abrasiveness would’ve been more of a deterrent than it was.

He’s not jealous, because that would be completely absurd. Izuku can like whoever Izuku wants to like - he has so few people in his corner already that it must be exciting to get another one on his side. And

while Nemuri was a fine playmate the one time she was over, she clearly has next to no experience with children and there was an awkwardness between her and Izuku that hadn't gone away by the time she left.

Hizashi's the only person who's played with Izuku in a long time that isn't Shouta or Inko, and he's considerably better at it than Shouta is.

Shouta, who's stubbornly reticent and dry at his kindest, is not great at playing. Shouta, who didn't even know how to play with kids when he was a kid, tries when he can, but he's a subpar playmate at best.

Shouta - the emotionally damaged time traveler who struggles to be fully in the moment when he has to spend every free minute he has trying to keep the world from going to shit a second time - is, perhaps, a little jealous of how quickly Izuku took to Hizashi.

Not a lot.

But enough that he blows off taking out the trash for the night and focuses on finishing the few chores that he can't skip as quickly as possible.

He's just about to wipe his hands off and dart into the living room when Izuku comes running into the kitchen and nearly tackles him to the floor. He has an eight-year-old clinging to his back and saying, "Eraserhead, the villain's being MEAN! You gotta come help or else he's gonna - " he stops abruptly and furrows his brow. "Um. I didn't really get his evil plan. But he's gonna do something BAD!"

"Mwahaha! Something terrible!" Hizashi agrees loudly. He appears to be buried beneath the couch cushions and pretending to emerge from them in slow motion, making groaning noises and cursing heroes everywhere.

Shouta says, "Oh yeah?"

Izuku nods emphatically. "I can't beat him alone! He's too big and loud and - "

"Hey, ouch - "

"And and I need Eraserhead's help! I'm just a sidekick!"

"I dunno, seems misleading to say you're *just* a sidekick. Eraserbit's more than thaaaa..." he trails off, realizing he just made a fatal,

terrible error.

Slowly, he turns to face the living room that has gone very, very silent. Izuku's grip around him is tight as he peeks around Shouta's back to look as well.

Hizashi's face has stretched into the widest, shit-eating grin possible.

Shouta's eyes narrow dangerously.

"You call him..."

"I did NOT come up with the name - "

"I cannot beliEVE - "

"Shut up, Inko made it up."

"HIS HERO NAME IS *ERASERBIT* ?! THAT'S THE CUTEST THING I' ve ever heard in my entire life - "

Shouta activates his quirk before Hizashi can break anything, snapping, "Hizashi, seriously? Tiny ears with tiny eardrums!"

" *How can you expect me to be quiet when he's so goddamn cute I mean honestly Shouta, you don't have to go all 'protective Papa Bear' on me of all people* - "

"MR. 'ZAWA WHY DOES YOUR HAIR GO UP LIKE THAT WHEN YOU USE YOUR QUIRK THAT'S SO COOL AND YOUR EYES ARE RED IS THAT SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN WHY DO THEY DO THAT CAN YOU MAKE YOUR EYES RED EVEN IF YOU DON'T USE YOUR QUIRK WHAT ABOUT YOUR FLOATING HAIR CAN YOU FLOAT OTHER STUFF WHAT ABOUT - "

"Inside voice, Izuku."

"You're so COOL though!"

" *Oh you tell ME to shut up but Izuku gets a nice request to use his 'inside voice'... I see how it is, I should've known you would pick favorites.* "

Izuku looks at Hizashi, then at Shouta, then tightens his grip on Shouta. "Am I really your favorite, Mr. 'Zawa?"

Shouta pretends to think about it for a second. "Do you still think All Might is cooler than me?"

Izuku shakes his head frantically.

He hums and finally looks away from Hizashi, pleased despite himself. “Alright. Yeah. You’re my favorite.”

“I never took you for the jealous type, Shouta.”

“Unfortunately, I always took you for the annoying type.”

“You’re so MEAN, Shouta!”

“Mr. ‘Zawa’s not mean!” Izuku immediately protests. “I’ve never been someone’s favorite before! He’s the nicest!”

“You’re your mom’s favorite,” Shouta says. “By far.”

“I’m her only kid though, so I’m the favorite by default and that doesn’t really count.”

“You’re the only kid I know.”

Izuku frowns. “You said Mr. ‘Zashi and Missus Nemuri are pretty much kids though.”

“Ah. Good point.”

Hizashi sputters, Izuku nods in satisfaction, and Shouta reaches for his phone that decided to start vibrating halfway through Izuku’s statement.

Caller ID says it’s the police station, but he’s on vacation. He sends it to voicemail.

It immediately rings again.

Sighing, he picks up. “What?”

“Hi Shouta,” a sheepish, unexpected voice says. “Um. Sorry to call so late.”

He blinks. “Inko?” He glances at the clock and winces when he realizes it’s already approaching eleven. Izuku should’ve been in bed hours ago, but they spent so long sitting around and talking that they didn’t eat dinner until late. Then Hizashi brought out the strawberry cake he brought over, then he and Hizashi had a cup of coffee while Izuku watched the newest All Might cartoon episode, then Izuku wanted to play -

Not important.

Inko's at the police station for some reason.

He forces himself to take even breaths.

She sounds fine. She doesn't sound like she's in distress or like anything is wrong. Izuku is at his waist, Hizashi is barely ten feet away, and Inko is likely fine. The last time he panicked, nothing was wrong and he looked like a moron.

Deep breaths, Shouta.

"It's me."

"Are you okay? What's going on?"

"In my defense, this isn't something that I make a habit of doing - I've been arrested once before, you know, so it really isn't a problem and at least this time I'm only a little drunk as opposed to black out so it's almost definitely fine, and really - I mean, who thinks it's okay to just! To just grope someone! Who does that? It's rude, and I don't think it's very polite - did they arrest that guy though? Nope, just me and Nemuri, but he's the one who was being mean so I don't think this is very fair at all Shouta and if you could come and clear things up for us I'd owe you more than I already do which is plenty and - Officer, please, I'm on the phone - they're really kind of annoying, the cops, aren't they? I wasn't even causing any trouble whatsoever - "

"Inko, focus," Shouta advises. "What happened?"

There's a bit of a scuffle on the other end of the line, and a familiar voice comes through. "Ms. Midoriya has been arrested for illegal public quirk usage and public intoxication," Officer Sansa says dryly. "Some drunk was harassing her companion and Ms. Midoriya took… action to stop him. Said companion claims to be the pro-hero Midnight but doesn't have her hero license with her to support said claim."

"Moron," Shouta mutters. "I'll come pick them up. Are they actually in trouble?"

"Nah," Sansa laughs. "It's hardly worth it to charge a housewife and pro-hero. Unless the guy presses charges - he's at the ER now for. Er. Penile injury - but I doubt it. I didn't know you were married, Eraser."

“I’m not.”

“Not *yet* ?”

“Not,” he repeats firmly. “They’re both fine? No injuries or anything? And - ‘penile injury’? What does that mean? What did Inko do?”

In the background, he can barely hear Inko politely saying, “Officer please I was speaking to Shouta and I would like to reit’rate that I was really not doing anything wrong and who would blame me for giving his dick a - just a little tug when clearly that’s all he was thinking with. He really didn’t need to be such a baby about it, you know, my eight-year-old is less of a baby than that man was, so if you would let me please - “

“Ms. Midnight seems a little shaken, but Ms. Midoriya is keeping her calm. They’ll keep until you get over here.” There’s a pause, then Sansa adds, “You know, if you don’t put a ring on this fine lady - “

Shouta hangs up.

Then he covers his face with his hands and, helplessly, starts laughing.

Hizashi whispers, “Holy shit, they broke Shouta. What happened? Who was that? Shouta?”

“Language,” he finally wheezes. “Izuku, grab a sweater. We have to go pick up your mom and Nemuri. They’re um. They need a hero escort home, so we’re going to give it to them.”

“‘Kay!” he chirps happily. “I’m gonna wear the sweatshirt Mr. ‘Zashi got me!”

“Great, good. Go get it.”

He’s still wheezing as he makes his way over to Hizashi and motions him closer. Hizashi, warily curious, leans in.

Shouta cups his hands around Hizashi’s ear and says lowly, “Inko might have ripped some guy’s dick off and she’s been arrested.”

“Holy shit.”

“I can’t fucking breathe - this is the funniest fucking thing that’s happened in ages - Inko looks like. She’s so small, Hizashi, she looks like a goddamn teddy bear and she might’ve used her quirk to *pull a*

guy's dick off - "

"Oh my god."

"If you still want to meet Inko - They're both drunk, so if you don't want to come - "

"Of course I do, who do you think I am?! We can take my car."

not just bad guys get arrested

Chapter Summary

Time to pick up Inko and Nemuri.

Chapter Notes

guys ;__; we passed 3000 kudos... i got a little teary with that. i started writing this and wasn't expecting for it to go as far as it's gotten, because i thought it was kinda silly... but you all like it??? and have been reading????? and keeping up with the fic???? i'm just incredibly, incredibly grateful. and i still have so much farther to go!!! i have so much more planned for this!!!! and i really hope that you all keep enjoying and keep reading and keep making this a great experience all around

additionally!!! everyone keeps asking if izuku will get one-for-all or not. is he going to be a quirkless hero? is he going to have ofa and do something with it???? and the answer is: *it's a secret*~ OFA is going to play a big role in the future. there's going to be a very poetic metaphor and all with it. i have the ending of this fic planned out and OFA plays a role in that. but i'm not spoiling it~

second additionally: i was asked by one commenter if it would be okay to do fanart (and i apologize i can't find the damn comment or else i'd reply to it directly OTL): of course it is??? i'm flattered that you would want to???? i'd ask that you tag me in it (mutalune on tumblr, @mutalune on twitter) wherever you post it so i can see it but like. go wild i'm just here having fun my dudes and i want you all to have fun too

thank you all for reading <3

Inko looks far too pleased with herself when they walk into the station.

The two of them are sitting on a plain bench near Sansa's desk. Inko's smug face is red, her clothes and hair are disheveled, and she has her arm entwined with Nemuri's tightly. Nemuri is swaying slightly in her seat and facing Inko, smiling a dopey smile. Her eyes are red like she had been crying recently, but her face is dry.

Shouta desperately bites back the laughter that is bubbling up. He's

been nearly hysterical since getting the call from Sansa, and seeing Inko's visible satisfaction is almost enough to set him off again. Next to him, Hizashi mutters, “That’s Inko then? Huh.”

Izuku, innocent as ever, waves excitedly and bounces on the balls of his feet. “Hi Mama!”

Inko’s head whips around, and her face brightens. “Izuku! Sweet boy, whatcha doing here?” She opens her free arm for Izuku to dart into and hugs him tightly.

“Mr. ‘Zawa said you needed a hero’s escort home, so Eraserhead and Eraserbit and Present Mic are here to save the day!” he says while putting his hands on his hips. He strikes a heroic pose, sending Inko into a fit of giggles.

Inko giggles louder when Shouta and Hizashi approach, burying her face in Izuku’s hair.

“Had a fun night then?” Shouta asks dryly, sticking his hands on his hips.

Nemuri’s head shoots up and, weirdly enough, she looks disappointed to see Shouta. She ducks her head and mumbles, “Lotsa fun,” despite sounding like misery personified.

Shouta doesn’t know what he did to deserve that kind of greeting. He’s not the worst person to have bail you out, though he certainly wouldn’t be his own first choice given any other option. His first choice, though, is the brat who got arrested in the first place.

Inko, oblivious to Shouta’s judgement, cheerily says, “We drank tequila! I haven’t had a tequila shot since undergrad, and Nemuri knew the bartender so he gave us lots and lots.”

“You - “ Nemuri squints, lifts her head to peer at Inko. “Not since college but. You drink like a fish. A drowning fish. How.”

“Baby weight,” she says sagely. “Stress weight. Chub. Soft stuff. Y’know. Mom stuff.”

“And what lovely stuff it is,” Nemuri leers. Then she suddenly straightens and looks up at Shouta warily. “Er. Yeah. But. We’re drunk.”

“So drunk,” Inko agrees. “Izuku, baby, don’t do this until you’re big

and older or else I'm going to take away all your All Might stuff."

Izuku gasps and wiggles out of the hug. "Mama!"

"Yep," she insists dramatically. "All of it. You have to be better than your delinquent mother who got her butt arrested, mmkay?"

His eyes widen. "You got ARRESTED?" he asks, as if he had no clue they had just walked into a police station to pick Inko up. For all of his smarts, Izuku is still a kid. Oblivious and easily excited.

Shouta is quick to assure him. "She's fine. She's not going to jail or anything like that. I just have to fill out some paperwork for her."

"B-but Mama's not a bad guy! Why'd they arrest her?"

"Sometimes," Inko says. "Sometimes, you break a law to help someone and even though you help someone, you still get arrested 'cause you still broke the law. So don't go breaking laws now unless you got a really good reason."

Shouta prays fervently that he hasn't inadvertently changed the future so Deku-the-pro-hero becomes Eraserbit-the-vigilante-who-breaks-laws-because-he-can. The world can't handle someone with Izuku's intellect throwing caution to the wind and eschewing laws completely. He's belatedly realizing that his own anti-spotlight-hero rhetoric may be influencing both of the Midoriyas more than he intended.

There is a very high chance this will come back to bite him in the ass later on. He tries not to think about how horrifically wrong he might have fucked up the timeline already and how the consequences might ruin everything he's been working towards.

Hizashi nudges him with his elbow and startles him out of his thoughts. He asks, "You alright there, Shouta?"

"Fine," he answers automatically. "Don't break laws, Izuku. It's inconvenient at best and annoying at worst."

Izuku frowns deeply but nods. "Okay. But Mama, why'd you break a law?"

Inko nearly tips over as she leans forward to poke Izuku's nose lightly. Shouta quickly presses her shoulder back so she doesn't fall forward and forces her to use the bench's backrest. "Someone was being very very mean to Ms. Nemuri here, and Ms. Nemuri couldn't do anything

since she's a hero and heroes get in trouble if they use their quirks against civilians. So I used my quirk and made him stop."

As expected, Izuku gasps in awe. "You were a hero to a hero! Mama, that's so COOL!"

Inko's eyes light up with joy. She spins to face Shouta, points in his face, and triumphantly declares, "See! I can still be cool to my kid! You don't get to be the only cool one in the house. I have cred, y'know."

"Blast," Shouta deadpans. He pushes her back in her seat again. "My monopoly on being cool has been defeated. However will I go on."

Nemuri, meanwhile, leans over and motions Hizashi closer. When he crouches down dutifully, she stage whispers to Hizashi, "She pulled his dick until he CRIED, 'Zashi, it was beeeeeautiful."

Hizashi grins, and if Shouta didn't know that he was fresh from recovery, he wouldn't have noticed the slight discomfort in it. "I can only imagine, Nem. You feeling alright?"

Her face falls, her smile melting away like it was never there. "'M okay."

"You don't sound it. What's the matter?" he sits down next to her on the bench she and Inko are huddled on, puts an arm around her shoulders and pulls her in tight. "Want me to get you some water?"

"'M just. Tired. Gets old always getting groped and stared at and touched and. Y'know. All that." She waves a hand vaguely. "All 'cause m'quirk needs open skin and that automatically means 'sex,' y'know? Just. Tired of it."

Inko leans over and pats the arm that's still tucked in between her own. "S'not your fault, Nemmy. Some people are just gross. You should be able to be a hero and work and use your quirk and do whatever you want without someone being a jerk to you."

Nemuri puts her hand on top of Inko's and gives her a wobbly smile. "Just feels like it's something I'm doing. Y'know? Bein' the sexy hero and all. Like it's my fault. But I didn't know it'd mean open season on my ass all the time. They said it's the best way to market me but I'm real tired of it." She sniffs and scrubs at her eyes. "Sorry."

"No," Inko says, moving to pat her face lightly. "No sorry. You didn't

do anything wrong."

"I ruined our girl's night out - "

"Nooope!" Inko slaps her hand across Nemuri's mouth and beams brightly. "I had plenty of fun! Not ruined at all. And even if it was, what'd you do? Dare to look pretty around some pervert? S'not your fault for like. Standing. And wearing clothes. Or not wearing clothes even! They're the ones being pigs."

Nemuri looks starstruck and a little teary.

On the other end of the spectrum, Hizashi looks like he's been slapped across the face, which is what Shouta imagines his own face looks like.

There's been plenty of nights out - both the last time around when they were all teachers together, and even in this timeline right after they graduated - where Nemuri's been hit on around them. In some cases because she's an attractive woman, in plenty of others because men recognized her as the 18+ hero, and all of them she's brushed off with either a laugh or a kick to their crotch.

It never occurred to Shouta that Nemuri's aggressive flirting might be a defensive tactic used to scare people off before they can bother her. It never occurred to Shouta that Nemuri didn't enjoy the attention her raunchy hero persona gave her. It never occurred to Shouta that Nemuri would've picked her hero persona before she graduated, before she really had a chance to grow up and be an adult and see how terribly easy it is to be reduced to a sexual object in the eyes of the public.

It never occurred to him how *young* she was when she debuted. People in their young twenties don't realize how young they are, how young teenagers are - But Shouta's lived much longer than his peers, and now he has the perspective to realize how fucked up Midnight: the 18+ hero is as a concept when Nemuri was barely eighteen herself when she became a full-time pro.

Shouta had to have conversations with plenty of his students over the years about public image and media presence. It's not his forte, since the whole point of his area of heroics is to not have either, but he made sure to know what agencies should be avoided if his students wanted to do actual hero work and not be reduced to ditzy celebrities. He remembers long advising sections with Momo when she was on the verge of graduating, trying to pick apart the offers she had received

and figure out which wouldn't take advantage of her relative innocence and would actually market her as the capable woman she was rather than the pretty bimbo the industry wanted her to be.

He also remembers Midnight barging in and forcefully taking over, blacklisting a number of teams that Shouta had no idea would be a problem.

Shouta doesn't remember Nemuri having someone looking out for her when she was making those same decisions.

Teenagers are so much younger than they think they are. It makes him a little nauseous to realize that Midnight was barely out of childhood when she debuted and for how long she's been regarded as the "sexiest" hero. They're barely adults now, and she's already won a number of "Sexiest Woman Alive"-style awards.

It's not something he had ever thought of before, and Shouta feels like the worst friend in the world. No wonder she never understood why her "teasing" the students was a problem. No wonder she never understood why her flirting with the rest of the staff occasionally made meetings uncomfortable. No wonder she is as raunchy and over-the-top as she, no wonder -

And the way she's talking - like it's her fault -

"Ms. Nemuri, don't be sad," Izuku says earnestly. He reaches forward to pat her thigh gently and gives her the brightest smile he has. "There's a lot of really mean people out there, but we're here! Mama's the nicest person ever and so is Mr. 'Zawa and Mr. 'Zashi is really nice too, so even if everyone else is mean, we won't be. That makes me feel better when people are mean to me - there's a whole three people who are really great and care about me! And you have four, 'cause you have my three people and me." He nods decisively.

Once again, Izuku proves himself to be more heroic than the literal heroes in the room. It shouldn't surprise Shouta anymore that he knows what to say to, if not make things better, then at least provide momentary comfort.

Nemuri sniffles again and pats his hand back. "You have four too, y'know. Me too. I'm not good with kids but you're a good kid so I'll try to be good too."

This whole conversation would be immensely sweeter if Inko and Nemuri weren't so drunk that Shouta can smell the booze on their

breath. They're both a huge mess, swaying around like an umbrella caught in a tornado, and while they couldn't leave Izuku home alone, it's becoming clear that there's potential for him to be exposed to behavior from his mother that he might be a little young for at this point in time.

It's probably a good idea to get them home.

"Wanna get them into the car while I make sure everything's sorted out here?" Shouta asks Hizashi. "They'll all fit in back, right? I'm sure Izuku can keep them entertained if you need a minute alone."

The strain in Hizashi's face eases somewhat. He gives Shouta a soft look that has no business being as heart-wrenchingly pretty as it is. Shouta doesn't know why - he's sticking him with the shit job. All he has to do is fill out some meaningless paperwork. After a beat, Hizashi gives him an equally soft smile. "Thanks, Shouta. I'm alright. I'll get them handled."

Shouta starts walking away before he's forced to process why his face feels hot. He calls out, "Izuku, tell your mom and Nemuri about dinner with Mic while I sign them out. I'm sure your mom's wondering about your new sweater."

That gets the kid going well enough. His enthusiasm should make Hizashi's job easier, at least, since he'll keep the drunks entertained. They walk out the doors to the sound of Izuku excitedly pointing out the Present Mic patches and the exact hex code of the yellow thread used on it. Inko oohs and ahhs appropriately while Nemuri leans on Hizashi and giggles.

Shouta enjoys a brief moment of peace before approaching Sansa, who obligingly hands over a clipboard of paperwork. Shouta, legally, shouldn't be filling this out on Inko's behalf, but neither of them give that much of a damn.

Inko is lucky that the officer on duty for the drunk tank tonight was someone like Sansa - someone with a mutation quirk that makes him, by nature, lax with the public quirk usage laws since he's never had to worry about them himself. Sansa's one of the few officers that Shouta doesn't hate working with since he has his feet firmly on the ground and is willing to cut corners when necessary (as opposed to when he doesn't feel like doing his job, which is the case for more officers than Shouta would ever try to count.)

"So…" Sansa starts slowly, teasingly. "That's not your girlfriend

then?"

"Obviously not," Shouta says, not taking his eyes off of the clipboard. "Inko could do way better."

"Hm." Sansa waits for him to finish with the page he's on before asking, "So, that means you wouldn't mind giving her my number when she's sobered up?"

"I'll say it again: Inko could do *way* better."

"Ouch." He mimes taking a shot to the chest. "That hurts, Eraser."

"You'll live."

Sansa laughs. Again, he waits until Shouta's finished with a page before saying, "While I have you here - I wanted to give you a heads up that a temp guy around here - Tsukauchi - has been looking for you. He wants to talk to you about the Overhaul operation. I guess it's connected to one of his old cases and he wants to make sure everything's tied up right. He's already made his way through the officers involved, but he found out you were the one who got the original lead and…" He trails off and eventually shrugs.

"Tsukauchi, huh?" Shouta murmurs. He vaguely remembers the man being affiliated with All Might and being better known as All Might's "in" with the police force back in the day. Outside of that - he can't remember the man's face or if he's worked with him before. He certainly hasn't worked with him yet this time around. "Thanks for the information. I'm still on vacation though, so if it can wait…"

"It seems like it's nothing urgent. Just filling in some blanks, from the way he tells it. It should keep."

"Thanks. I guess I won't tell Inko to block your number."

Sansa laughs louder as Shouta gives him a - for Eraserhead, at least - jovial wave goodbye.

The rest of the station is quiet now that his drunks have left. It must be a slow night. Sometimes, Shouta envies police officers for how much downtime police officers have. Because heroes do most of the actual apprehending, there are plenty of nights where they just hang out and wait for criminals to be dropped off. He'd get so much more sleep if he worked as hard as cops do.

Outside, Hizashi's leaning against the driver-side door, arms crossed and eyes closed. It looks like their charges have already fallen asleep or are on their way to doing so, since Nemuri's drooling face is pressed unattractively against the window and two tiny feet seem to be using her lap as a footrest. Hizashi's shoulders are tense, and there's a tightness to the frown on his face that Shouta doesn't like the look of.

Shouta leans against the car, next to Hizashi, and waits.

After a few moments, Hizashi says, "I went to work like that, you know. Giggly and stupid, I mean. There's coworkers - sidekicks, even - who think that's just how I am. Peppy, goofy, a little clumsy... Meanwhile, it's a miracle that I didn't get anyone killed like that."

Shouta had the same thought a long time ago, decades ago when he and Hizashi were constantly at each other's throats and all Shouta wanted was for Hizashi to *think* about the consequences of his actions. It was incredibly, incredibly lucky that Hizashi was never charged with negligence or involuntary manslaughter - especially in the few years before he became a teacher and his habits became astronomically worse.

He can't exactly say, "Don't worry - you're doing much better this time. You came around so much faster. You went to *rehab* , which I know the first-you didn't. You're doing good."

So he stays silent. Moves a little closer so their elbows are touching and hopes that's enough.

Hizashi finally opens his eyes, but he doesn't turn to look at Shouta. Looking straight ahead, he says, "I don't know if it's a good idea for me to be alone tonight. I don't think I'd do anything, but - I just. If you don't mind."

"Of course you're staying over. You think I want to deal with a hungover Nemuri by myself?" Shouta makes a show of rolling his eyes. "No thanks. I'm sure Izuku would love to show you his waffle maker that puts All Might's face on everything."

He finally cracks a smile. "You suffer so much."

"I don't think me wanting to have a waffle that doesn't have a blonde doofus on it is a big ask. That's all I'm saying."

d(*⌒▽⌒*)b

Chapter Summary

Back to school.

Chapter Notes

i'm so sorry to everyone who wanted bed-sharing during the impromptu sleepover... i missed an opportunity... shouta was too logical that's my excuse...

i did also want to clear something up!!! b/c a few ppl brought it up!!! the AFO vs. All Might Big Showdown Let's Destroy All Might's Internal Organs and AFO's Face - that already happened in this fic. there's no lead up to it, it already happened here - i dunno what the canon timeline says about when it happened and if me writing fic isn't evidence enough that i don't give a fuck about what canon says, then i'll say it for good measure: i don't care about canon, this is my sandbox where i'm building my sandcastle and i only use the pretty seashells that canon gives me as decoration and nothing more.

(but yeah i forget when i said it but in one of the early chapters izuku made a comment about making a card for his dad who was sick, and that was supposed to be a little foreshadowing of his dad being AFO b/c he made the card when AFO was in the hospital post-All Might fight and was in the immediate recovery phase.)

anyway: thank you all so much! for the nice words! and for reading!!! i hope you all continue to enjoy~ i liked this chapter a lot. and fun fact: i had to split the document i'm writing this fic in into a separate document after this chapter b/c the doc was getting too big for my weak computer to handle lmao... does that officially make this a Long Fic?

The rest of summer follows a similar pattern - minus the “Inko getting arrested” bit.

That night, after a much too long car ride and Nemuri’s loud snores, they arrived back at the Midoriya apartment bleary-eyed and ready to catch as much sleep as possible. Shouta carried Izuku to his bed, nudged Inko into hers, let Nemuri have his, bickered with Hizashi

until the loud idiot took the couch, then slept on the floor in his sleeping bag.

The next morning, Nemuri left before anyone else awoke - clearly unready to discuss any of the goings-on of the night before and unwilling to risk any sort of confrontation. Shouta woke up next, unable to get comfortable when so many non-normal inhabitants were in his space. He started making breakfast just for something to do.

Hizashi barely stayed long enough to see the infamous All Might waffle maker before he rushed out the door for work. Shouta handed him a buttered waffle wrapped in a paper towel a moment before the door slammed shut - he was gifted with a strangely agonized expression before a faux-cheery, “Thanks!” was yelled through the door.

Inko’s hangover is best left undiscussed. Once he woke up, Izuku was more than happy to eat the extra blueberry waffles she gagged over.

Overall, it was a fun night. Shouta tries not to tease Inko about it too much, because her face gets bright red every time.

Inko and Nemuri clearly bonded over their drunken experience and have now been spending plenty of time texting each other and growing their new friendship. Fridays have become their unofficial “grab dinner and a drink” nights, and Inko comes back from each of them glowing.

Shouta, who has been fairly content with minimal amounts of social interaction over the years, had no idea that Inko was so starved for friendship. He’s glad that the two of them hit it off so well.

Hizashi uses the opportunity to make Fridays his time to come over and bother Shouta and Izuku. Their coffee meetings have been postponed until the school year starts because of the schedule change, but Izuku’s happiness is worth missing his weekly frappuccino for a bit. He’s a better guest than Shouta would’ve guessed, bringing food with him and always dressed up like he’s a teenager on their first date. He keeps Izuku occupied and gushes over him without being too overwhelming.

Izuku flourishes under the attention. By the third visit, Present Mic is tied with All Might for Izuku’s second favorite hero.

“Eraserhead will always be my favorite,” Izuku assures Shouta after informing him of his personal rank’s changes. “And All Might means a

lot to me still! But Present Mic is a hero and he has his own radio show and he's started doing so much community outreach and - But! You're still my absolute most favorite."

Shouta says, "Wonderful," and it comes out significantly less sarcastic than he intended.

The only weirdness comes from the fact that Nemuri never meets his eyes anymore and Hizashi refuses to come over for dinner when Inko's available. Inko wants to spend time getting to know Hizashi when she isn't drunk or post-being arrested - her words, not his - but Hizashi always has some reason as to why he's not available when Inko is around.

Fridays are rapidly becoming an annoying mystery that Shouta doesn't have the energy to unravel on top of the other investigations he's undertaken.

Figuring out where the hell Shigaraki came from is more important than trying to find out why Hizashi keeps claiming to have a social life every night except Friday. Looking into the few breadcrumbs of Hisashi Midoriya's trail is easier than trying to get Nemuri to talk about her feelings. He told himself he would take a break from his personal cases while he was off of work, but he can only handle so much frustration from his best friends before he needs something to keep his mind off of their bullshit.

Not that any of his investigations are going well. He's hit a dead-end on every front. Without any more information about Hisashi Midoriya, without knowing who Tomura Shigaraki was before he became an evil megalomaniac, without any leads on any other members of the League of Villains since most of them are fucking children - well, he's stuck combing through the quirk registry and hoping they had been raised law-abiding citizens for at least a little bit around age four.

Eventually, though, after all the summer fun - Izuku is preparing for his first day back to school and Shouta, reluctantly, has to start going back to work full-time.

Even with the minor irritations of Hizashi's constant text messages and Izuku's near-fanatical obsession with the latest All Might documentary that was released, he enjoyed his vacation more than he thought he would. Maybe the general populace is onto something with "regular breaks" and "time off."

On the other hand, he's staring at his work email and already

dreading the game of catch-up he's going to have to play for at least a full week. Slinky - an underground hero with a flexibility quirk - has apparently been throwing fits over the number of patrols they've had to cover for him, and Inspector Karin is demanding to know how Eraserhead was scheduled for more than the maximum number of shifts a week. Sansa is asking for Inko's number again - inappropriate on a professional basis, and Shouta will ream him out for that later - and at least three officers have repeatedly asked questions that could've been answered by reading any of his past case files.

He hates working with police. The day when he has his teaching salary again and can fund independent work can't come soon enough, in his opinion. He'll take his own cases instead of working on whatever's been handed to him, he'll have a consistent patrol schedule instead of filling in where other, more popular heroes can't, and he won't have to fill out so much goddamn paperwork just to help people.

The earliest he'll be able to manage that, though, is at least two years down the line. Unlike All Might, who can waltz into any position purely on the basis of being the "Symbol Of Peace", Shouta needs to get his proper certifications and accreditations before he'll be allowed in a classroom. They won't be hard when taking into account he's been a teacher for most of his adult life, but it's still a process.

Not as arduous of a process as getting Izuku out the door is turning into, and for that, Shouta can only be grateful.

"If you hate them this much, we can get you a new pair this weekend," Shouta bargains, holding out Izuku's shoes pleadingly. "For now, can you put the damn things on so you won't be late?"

Izuku shuffles in place, not meeting his eyes. "N-no, I mean, I don't hate them, but um. They. They're too small?"

He visibly winces at Shouta's bland look.

"Is that a question or a statement?"

"Um."

"First it was your backpack wasn't packed, then you didn't have the right shirt, then you spilled milk ON the shirt and you had to change AGAIN, now it's the shoes - what's the actual problem? You're not this picky. So something's up."

“N-no, it’s not - I just. Um.“

“Izuku.”

“Well!” Izuku finally bursts out, tears welling up. “Last time I saw everyone I was yelling and being mean and what if Kacchan hates me even more now and what if things are even worse than before and w-what if - “

“‘Zuku, breathe.”

Izuku takes a gasp of a breath, and a few tears finally spill over. Shouta sighs and crouches down next to him, patting his head lightly and brushing away the wetness on his face.

He hates how helpless this makes him feel. He hates that there’s nothing he can do to make Izuku’s school life less of a living hell.

“You have that phone your dad gave you, right?”

He nods, sniffling. “Uh-huh.”

“If it’s too much - if you want to come home - call me. Or text me. Whatever. I’ll come get you. No matter what. Okay?”

Another nod.

“I’m sorry that I can’t make this better. I’m sorry that you have to go. If I could homeschool you, I would.”

“‘S okay. Not your fault.”

It feels like it is, sometimes.

Izuku is a strong kid. He finally puts on his brave face, pulls his shoes on with determination, wraps his scarf tightly around his neck, and takes Shouta’s hand to start their trek to the elementary school. His tiny, somewhat clammy hand is using Shouta as a lifeline and clutching him like he’ll float away if he doesn’t have Shouta anchoring him down.

The neighborhood is already awake around them. There’s a cafe where businessmen are walking in and out of, chattering away on bluetooth headsets and into smartphones. A laughing girl rides by on her bicycle, getting chased by a friend who’s shouting and running after her. It’s the kind of morning where the moon is still visible even though the sun is shining brightly.

Izuku must be sweating, or at the very least uncomfortably warm underneath his layers and scarf, but the hand that isn't digging its nails into Shouta's palm is buried in its folds. It can't be healthy to have a security blanket at his age - especially one that has the potential to give him heatstroke - but considering the circumstances, Shouta thinks he deserves whatever comfort he can find.

Because he can, he surreptitiously snaps a photo of Izuku's determined face and sends it to Hizashi, Inko, and Nemuri with the caption: *'Eraserbit's mission of the day - survive the first day back at school.'*

Hizashi responds almost immediately: *'he's got it!!! d(*∩▽∩*)b go eraserbit!! best hero best boy best student!!!!!~~~~!'*

Nemuri's next: *'^^absolute q-t-pie plz squish those cute cheeks of his for meeee and tell him to have a great day'*

And, right as the school comes into view, Inko sends, *'my hero <3 hang in there, bb boy'*

He stops them before Izuku crosses the threshold. At the kid's questioning look, he holds out his phone and says, "Remember, you've got all of us in your corner. Forget about those losers. Do your work, do it well, and then at home we'll do something fun. Got it?"

Izuku reads the messages and barely gets through them before his face curls into a small, soft smile. He nods, curly hair bouncing everywhere. "Okay! Maybe we can make cookies? Or a cake?"

"Whatever you want. I'm sure your mom won't mind." He ruffles his hair one last time. "You got this."

"I got this!" Izuku gives him a thumbs up. "Bye, Mr. 'Zaw - "

"Oi! Nerd!"

Izuku freezes. Turns around slowly.

Shouta slowly raises an eyebrow.

Running towards them, panting and red-faced, is Katsuki Bakugou. His hair is longer - he must not have cut it over the summer, because it's covering his eyes and he's angrily brushing it away in harsh swipes of his hands. His backpack is bouncing against him as he runs, the zipper caught in something that looks like red fabric.

He skids to a stop barely a foot away from Izuku, who flinches and leans back just a hair.

Bakugou gasps for breath for a few seconds before standing up straight and pulling his backpack in front of him.

“Kacchan?”

“Shut up,” he snaps, struggling with the backpack’s zipper. He tugs at it, growling lowly, before he finally rips it free of whatever it’s stuck on. “Stupid nerd. You’ve got some nerve, you know. Having that whole - whatever - and then disappearing all summer. Who do you think you are, anyway?”

Shouta knew Bakugou as well as anyone could, he thought. The kid was a mess of issues the first time around, enough that he was barely a pro-hero for a year before his agency shoved him into therapy and refused to let him into the field until he was cleared by a whole panel of mental health professionals. His talent and dedication to his work were unparalleled, and he was a decent enough hero once his therapist got through to him.

His social skills were never great. The class 1-A alumni were the only real friends he ever made, as far as Shouta could tell, and at best, he had colleagues he didn’t actively piss off. It made it painful to watch any publicity events Bakugou attended, but at the end of the day, he was a good hero and a good enough man. The people who knew him cared for him despite his rough exterior, and he clearly cared for them back in his own abrasive way.

That, in addition to his younger self’s cruelty towards Izuku, means Shouta has more than a few reasons to be absolutely baffled by what Bakugou triumphantly whips out of his bag, smug smile already in place.

Izuku looks equally befuddled, glancing at Bakugou’s hands and then his face like he’s waiting for the punchline.

Katsuki Bakugou is expectantly holding out a squished bouquet of absolutely hideous flowers, tied together by a giant, crooked red bow. It’s a mixture of clashing colors - lavender, yellow, green, and orange, to name a few - and absolutely random flowers in varying stages of wilting despair. He can spy crooked daisies, mums, tulips, and at least four dandelions. There’s roots and dirt still on the dandelions, indicating that those, at least, were picked fresh this morning.

The bow is drooping and half-undone. It looks as confused as Shouta feels.

When Izuku makes no move to take the abomination, Bakugou's face twists and he pushes it in his direction pointedly.

"I don't - w-what's this for?" Izuku asks hesitantly. "I don't understand."

"Stupid!" Bakugou scoffs. He stomps forward and picks up Izuku's hand - almost gently, at least by Bakugou's standards - and forces him to grasp the bouquet. "I shouldn't have to spell it out for you. They're flowers."

"Y-yeah, but w-why are you giving them to me…?"

Bakugou continues to look at Izuku like he's the dumbest person on the planet.

"When Dad pisses off the old hag, he gets her flowers," he recites. "It's s'posed to make it better. So stop being pissed at me. I won't call you a deku anymore."

Izuku's jaw drops.

Bakugou's face immediately turns bright red. He says, "You're still stupid and annoying and a pain! B-but I don't hate you and you shouldn't hate me when I'm this cool. That'd just make you stupider than you already are. So - stop it. Got it, nerd?"

"K-kacchan!" Izuku's already crying, snot and tears rolling down his face. "I-I don't h-hate y-y-y-y-you - "

"Stop crying! Of course you don't, I'm the best there is. You'd be a moron to hate me." Despite his words, he seems extremely pleased and reaches out to sling an arm over Izuku's shoulders. Izuku turns to bawl into his shoulder, which only seems to make Bakugou's grin even more smug. "C'mon loser. If anyone gives you shit, I'll beat them up! That's what All Might would do, wouldn't he? Protect someone weak and defenseless?"

Shouta has no idea what's happening.

But Izuku lifts his head to beam tearily and say, "Uh-huh!" and the absolute joy on his face is enough to make Shouta bite his tongue.

Bakugou says, “Duh. Now let’s leave the shitty hobo extra and go. The hag gave me an All Might cookie for snack today and maybe if you aren’t super annoying I’ll let you have some.”

Izuku says, “Mr. ‘Zawa isn’t a hobo! He’s the coolest!”

Bakugou rolls his eyes. “Whatever. C’mon already,” and drags him off without any further fanfare.

Izuku gives Shouta an excited wave goodbye over his shoulder before turning back around, clutching his flowers to his chest and staring at Bakugou dreamily. Bakugou puffs up like a peacock and doesn’t take his arm off of Izuku’s shoulder as they walk through the entrance.

Shouta turns around and goes home. He doesn’t think whatever just happened will make any more sense after a nap, but it certainly won’t hurt.

bite your tongue

Chapter Summary

Shouta returns to work, avoids his problems, and contemplates Katsuki Bakugou.

Chapter Notes

to whoever added this to fic collections that contain literally the coolest fics ever therefore implying that you think my fic is on the same level as those cool ones: you made me cry but it was a good cry thank you for that <3 <3 <3

i had so much fun writing the "reconciliation" between izuku and katsuki, and i'm really glad that everyone seemed to think it was cute!!! i also thought it was cute!!! i do want to say: don't expect any pairings between the itty-bitty characters. teenage romance isn't my area and i don't even know who i'd pair with izuku tbh like. he's such a baby right now... i can't even consider giving him a partner until he grows up and i can only write him as 8 yr old baby right now. so while i won't say there won't be any pairings for izuku & his peers, they won't have a huge plot relevance or be super important if they do happen.

as always: thank you all so much for reading and enjoying <3 i hope you continue to enjoy!!! this chapter's where some Actual Plot starts to happen~~ and there's a bit of a cliffhanger whoops

also complete disclosure i wrote this author's note after eating half an edible so i really really hope this is legible but if it isn't u guys can't mock me ok??

Work is work. It’s dull most of the time, sporadically interrupted with an adrenaline rush or injury, and more or less pays the bills.

Shouta didn’t miss it. Considering he’s been a workaholic for as long as he can remember, he's now questioning a good portion of his personality and wondering if he ever really liked work or if he just hated being alone for too long. He tends to be his worst enemy, after all, so it makes sense that he would rather do anything other than be left alone with his thoughts.

That, perhaps, is something to be addressed at a later date. For now, Shouta has a new crisis on his hands.

The new detective - Tsukauchi - has been trying to track him down. Just as Sansa warned, he wants to talk about the Overhaul case. He, apparently, wants to know how Shouta found his original lead.

Shouta hadn't thought anyone would give much of a fuck about how he supposedly heard about an underground human experimentation ring. He hadn't come up with a good reason to be investigating Kai Chisaki and the yakuza, hadn't thought he would need one when the bust was as massive as it was. In most cases since he's turned back time, it hasn't mattered much one way or the other if he had a concrete reason or if he blew it off with, "hero's intuition and luck."

He's not a big-time hero looking for fame. As long as criminals are being put behind bars and people are being saved, most people with any power don't give much of a fuck why Shouta does what he does or where his leads come from. Any explanations would merely slow the justice system down.

So, no, Shouta hadn't come up with an especially pertinent backstory for why he was tracking down yakuza members. What was the point when no one gave a damn?

Except now Tsukauchi apparently does.

Detective Tsukauchi, who Shouta had barely remembered until he saw that man's face again. Detective Tsukauchi, who has an interesting quirk called Lie Detector.

Detective Tsukauchi, who is about to make Shouta's life significantly more difficult.

It's obvious why All Might kept such close contact with him. Now that he has time to think about it, a quirk like that isn't very flashy, but its usefulness in just about any field - sales, healthcare, police work, hero work - must make Tsukauchi an extremely valuable ally to have. Shouta wishes he had thought to befriend the man this time around before being shoved into his crosshairs.

Whatever he's investigating, he'll be more than capable of poking holes in Shouta's story. "Time-travel" won't be the first thought he has when that happens, and at best, Eraserhead will be suspended while they try to figure out if he's a double-agent for whatever organized crime benefited the most from the takedown.

At worst, he'll lose his hero license for daring to appear somewhat suspicious. Underground hero or no, the Hero Commission takes their

image very seriously. They'd revoke his license in a heartbeat if there was a threat of him working for the yakuza. Or, more accurately: if there was a threat of him working for the yakuza *and* he was stupid enough to get caught.

It's not like the Hero Commission cares about morality or actual do-good work. Image, image, image. Whether a hero is acting against the law or not, it only matters if they get caught.

Avoiding Tsukauchi when he's spent the last thirty seconds staring at him and realizing how he just dove headfirst into boiling hot water isn't exactly something he can do without drawing more attention to himself, so he resignedly stays in place while the man approaches him with quick, efficient steps.

He wonders if Tsukauchi had ever been anything other than a detective, considering how lightly he walks. That's not a skill that the average-joe cop would need to cultivate. And, once again - his incredible quirk could get him a job just about anywhere. It's unlikely that his first choice of career was to waste his talents as a beat cop tracking down leads from a sleep-deprived, nobody pro.

"Eraserhead. It's nice to finally meet you face-to-face," the detective greets politely once he catches up to him. He holds out his hand to shake, which Shouta does with mostly-concealed reluctance. "Do you have a minute? I've been wanting to pick your brain about the Shie Hassaikai operation you shut down."

It's barely two in the morning, which is the Eraserhead equivalent of ten at night. He has plenty of minutes considering how quiet the night has been.

He jerks a thumb at the entrance and says, "Sorry, I can't. Tomorrow? I'll be in at nine for a few hours."

Tsukauchi's left eye twitches. "Unfortunately, this is related to a rather sensitive matter that I've been hoping to put to rest as quickly as possible. Are you sure you can't spare a few minutes?"

"I really can't," Shouta blatantly lies, just to see his eye twitch again. "I'm sure you've seen the files. Not sure what you need from me that isn't already documented."

"As I previously stated, I'm involved in a sensitive matter that I would like to handle with as much discretion as possible. Any insight you can provide me as to where you began looking - "

“It was just good ol’ fashioned police work,” Shouta lies again. Tsukauchi’s entire face spasms. “Nothing special. Even your… *esteemed* colleagues could have found it if they were in the right place at the right time. I got lucky.”

Tsukauchi manages to grit out, “Eraserhead - “ before Shouta tosses him a careless wave and starts walking out of the station.

“Tomorrow, detective,” he calls out. “Surely one night won’t make or break your case, now will it? I know how quickly the boys-in-blue solve cases these days… Sometimes it only takes you guys a few months to arrest the wrong guy!”

Having Tsukauchi as an ally could’ve been useful, but Shouta won’t risk everything he’s been working towards on a “could’ve been” when the same man could tear his cover story to bits if he knew what to ask about. Angering him and being as sarcastic as possible, disorienting him as much as he can manage, answering his questions in between so much fluffy bullshit - as far as he knows, that’s the only way he can get through this without Tsukauchi immediately knowing he’s jerking him around. If he’s sarcastic in one sentence, lying in every sentence and tossing in a truth or two, it’ll ping his quirk -

But he might not know what sentence set it off.

It’s the only idea he can think of. Giving vague answers would only raise as much suspicion as blatantly lying would, so he can’t lie by omission or state things too particularly. If Tsukauchi is half as good at his job as Shouta suspects, he would’ve learned how to spot “careful truths” a mile away when he first figured out the limitations to his quirk.

Hardly a foolproof plan, considering he’s antagonizing someone that could make his life significantly more difficult down the line, but it’s better for the man to think that Shouta is an unbearable prick than for him to catch on to the crap he’s spewing.

The good thing about working freelance is that, when he isn’t being rented out for a shit assignment, he can go home whenever he wants if he’s fine with not getting paid for the full night. Inko still won’t take his money for rent or groceries no matter how many times he offers, so that means he can afford to blow off a night or two when he needs to regroup.

The situation with Tsukauchi is threatening enough that regrouping is a necessity rather than a “nice-to-have.” It has the added benefit of

pissing the man off to work around Shouta's schedule rather than his own.

Unbalance him enough and Shouta should make it through with minimal pain.

He hopes, at least.

It's, thankfully, a problem for later. For now, he can go home, get an (almost) full night of sleep for once, and maybe have a day where he isn't half-asleep while he walks Izuku to school.

It wasn't a problem last school year when Shouta was the one pushing him out the door - now, though, Izuku starts every day with a new kind of energy and excitement that has him dragging Shouta down the street so fast that they leave skid marks on the sidewalk. Bakugou's "apology" clearly meant the world to Izuku, who looked up how to preserve flowers for as long as possible the minute he got home that day. Since then, he's been chomping at the bit every morning to go to school and wakes up earlier and earlier.

Shouta is still on the fence about whether this is a good or terrible development for more reasons than having to deal with a hyperactive ball of sunshine at six in the morning.

On one hand, Izuku having a friend at school and being actively excited for school rather than just tolerating it - that's a positive. At the absolute least, it means Shouta feels less like scum of the Earth when he drops him off in the morning. Izuku's happier - he's spending less time scouring online forums and more time initiating normal kid things to do like playing pretend and actually using the toys his mom spends an arm and a leg on. Shouta doesn't have to drag him out of his head as frequently, and his rambling is less frantic - less like he has to hurry to say everything he wants to say before the listener gets tired of it. He'll talk and talk about "how cool Kacchan is" and how they played heroes at recess and Bakugou let him be the civilian that gets saved instead of the villain.

On the other hand, Bakugou is still Bakugou. Rude, mean even when he's trying not to be, and holding onto a superiority complex surpassed only by its twin: his inferiority complex. He still puts Izuku down at every opportunity and is boasting his own praises more often than not. He still says hurtful things that send Izuku home crying. And, as far as Shouta can tell, Izuku doesn't really disagree with anything that Bakugou is saying. He just seems grateful that Bakugou

will let Izuku be in his presence without actively hurting him.

The scary part about it is that Izuku can clearly tell that Shouta and Inko don't like what Bakugou says to him, so he's stopped telling them exactly what he says. Some things slip - he's eight, after all - but there's already been too many times where Izuku is upset but won't tell them *why* . Too many times when Izuku comes home from school and hides in his room until dinner, when Shouta has to drag him out and tell him to stop playing dumb games on his phone.

Inko doesn't seem as concerned as Shouta feels. Or, at least, she didn't share her concerns with him when they were talking about it.

"I don't expect him to tell his mom everything, you know," she said. "We're close, but I don't want him feeling like he has to tell me every single detail of his life. My parents did that to me and - well, there's more than one reason why they're not in our lives anymore, but resenting them for hovering over my shoulder constantly didn't help the situation."

"I just think it's not a good sign that he's closing up out of nowhere. The only thing that's changed is Bakugou being back in his life in a non-bullying capacity. Doesn't that seem weird? It feels like he's hiding something."

She laughed. "I think you're reading too much into it. Izuku's eight - he's smart, but he's not at 'successfully lying to his parents' levels of smart just yet. It'd be a lot more obvious if there was something really wrong. Katsuki's... abrasive, certainly. But at the end of the day, they're just kids. If Izuku doesn't have any hard feelings over his previous behavior, then I don't see a reason to step in."

Shouta wishes he had said something like, "Izuku's self-esteem is so low that someone he admires could throw him to the ground, smear mud in his face, and as long as they weren't calling him 'deku', he'd smile and thank them for it."

Or maybe: "This is how abusive relationships start - blowing off the 'abrasiveness' or behavior as them being 'just kids' or 'just boys' or whatever the justification is, and then when it escalates, the victim uses those justifications much, much longer than they should."

But -

"If you say so," he had said. "You'd know better than I would what's normal for kids."

Inko's his mother.

At the end of the day, it's not Shouta's place to make decisions about who Izuku can be friends with. He can give Inko his opinions, he can encourage Izuku to make better choices, but arguing with Inko about her parenting decisions isn't something Shouta feels is appropriate when he's the interloper in the Midoriya family.

He doesn't want to lose his spot in their lives, and he's seen what his unfiltered honesty can make of relationships. Inko would be well within her rights to kick him to the curb whenever she wants, if she catches an inkling that Shouta is detrimental to Izuku's life in any way. Jumping the gun and crying wolf prematurely on a recently rekindled friendship just because Shouta's hypersensitive to the terrible, disgusting parts of society would be damaging to the way they've fit into each other's lives.

And, selfishly, Shouta doesn't want to fuck this situation up.

So maybe it isn't that big of a deal. Maybe Bakugou's a brat, but plenty of kids are. Izuku cries a lot even when Bakugou isn't in the equation, so maybe Bakugou makes him cry a perfectly normal amount when taking Izuku's constitution into account. Maybe Izuku's wearing long-sleeved shirts through the remnants of summer heat because of his cruddy fashion sense and not because he's not running away from Bakugou's bullying anymore. Maybe Izuku's not hiding something every time he avoids a question, but he's going through a weird privacy-oriented phase of childhood.

His worries aren't completely alleviated by these mantras, but there's not much he can do.

So he bites his tongue and keeps a wary eye on Izuku. He listens closely when Katsuki Bakugou comes up in conversation and does what he can to remind Izuku that he doesn't need to put up with anyone being mean to him. He even, when Inko isn't listening, gives him permission to use his self-defense training against Bakugou if he ever needs to.

By the time he's talked himself down from trying to have the same conversation with Inko again, he's home and more than ready to crawl into bed and deal with all of the crap in his life tomorrow. Tsukauchi, Bakugou, Shigaraki - he's never been much of a drinker, but any one of those problems would be enough to make him wish he was. The blissful embrace of sleep will have to do - and if he's lucky, he won't

be disturbed by nightmares.

For once, he's post-patrol without any injuries or too much grime. Inko would likely disagree and shove him into the shower, but she's asleep and Shouta doesn't care if he smells like stale sweat when he's going to be unconscious in the next few minutes.

Along the same lines, pajamas are a waste of money. He didn't bother buying any, so once he enters his room and quietly closes the door behind him, he quickly strips to his undershirt and boxers, wraps his yellow blanket around him, and dives under his covers with an eagerness that is more at home on a kid waiting impatiently for Santa Claus.

He takes his joy where he can find it. And, for a wonderful five minutes, he gets that joy. He can feel his eyes getting heavier, his muscles relaxing, his blankets warming slowly, his thoughts slowing -

Then he hears the softest, quietest noise. A little "swish" that, in theory, could be a tree branch moving or a gentle draft coming from the wind outside.

It could also be a window sliding open, though.

hero instincts, paranoia, reasonable caution, and the ever-blurring lines between them

Chapter Summary

Izuku's window is open. Shouta and Inko disagree about what, exactly, did the opening.

Chapter Notes

i wasn't gonna make you guys wait too long when there's a cliffhanger keeping you all on the edge of your seats ;) there's not much to say here. hopefully this chapter gives you an idea of what everyone who is Not Shouta is thinking about this entire situation a little bit more. i realized i never added the 'unreliable narrator' tag when i probably should've like. 4 chapters ago. i think you've all gotten the gist of that by this point but this chapter is really going to give a "okay wait so while we all know that shouta has Reasons for his behavior, other people are legit going to chalk it up to Any Other Reasonable Behavior Such As: Trauma, PTSD, and Suffering" vibe if i hit it right ~

additionally: i don't want to spoil anything, but re: bakugou in this fic. i promise this isn't going to bash him, but this isn't a bakugou redemption fic. he's got a lot going on, and as much as i want shouta to be able to fix Literally Every Child - i literally do not have the ability to juggle more than the plot lines i have going on right now and am planning on in the future, if i'm being completely honest. there will be changes to bakugou in relation to canon since like. he and izuku are going to have a different friendship and aizawa is hanging around changing stuff. but he's still the grumpy, snappy, sorta-mean sorta-gold-hearted kid that we all know he is. i hope i'll encompass that well enough ~

as always: thank you for reading and taking this journey with me. hope you enjoy this chapter~

Shouta knows he’s being paranoid.

It was a bird. Or the building settling. Or Inko moving in her sleep.

It could be a cat wandering on their neighbor’s balcony. It’s, most likely, just the wind.

His gut disagrees. Violently, with extreme protest, his gut is screaming at him to figure out what, exactly, is trespassing in his home. In *their* home.

He lurches out of bed, grabs his capture weapon from where he haphazardly dropped it, and makes sure not to make any sound as he steps out of his room into the living room. His night vision is better than most - potentially a side effect of his quirk, most likely due to years of overnight patrols - so it doesn't take long for him to determine there's no one immediately in there or the kitchen.

He checks behind the couch - in the little nook between the fridge and the counters - under the coffee table, under the dining room table, behind the shoe rack - in the bathroom, in the shower, in the tub, behind the toilet - under the dining room table a second time because there's a shadow -

The window is locked. He knows it is, because he came in through the window and he always locks it behind him. He checks anyway.

It's locked.

The front door, next. That's locked too - all three locks, the two that came with the apartment and the one that Shouta insisted on adding himself.

Inko's room is one of the few places that he doesn't regularly frequent. Izuku would share a room with Shouta given the opportunity and drags him in there to work on homework while All Might's eerily cheery smile watches over them.

Inko, though, values her privacy. Considering her past with Hisashi, Shouta doesn't blame her. It's an unspoken rule that Shouta stays out of her space unless there's an emergency.

Whether this counts as an emergency - well, Shouta will find out.

The door, thankfully, doesn't creak when he slowly opens it. He doesn't take in most of what he's seeing - it's a bedroom, with all the things a bedroom would normally have. The important thing is that there isn't anyone in the room except for Inko. She's a small ball in the middle of her queen-sized bed, curled up with pillows surrounding her and not a single blanket on.

At a later date, Shouta might try to psychoanalyze her sleeping habits. There's something telling about having a barrier of pillows but

pushing the covers off to the side.

He looks at her for a moment longer, confirming that her chest is rising and falling, before peering closer at the window. It's closed on the opposite end of the room. Three silent steps in, he jiggles the handle just enough to confirm it's locked before retreating and carefully closing the door.

That leaves Izuku's room.

Inside, the room's as creepy as ever. All Might's face is on every wall, his bookshelf is full of hero merchandise, and there's piles of paper everywhere. He's careful not to step on any of the pages covering the floor, darting around them with precise footwork. The kid's sprawled out on his bed, limbs flung in every direction, mouth wide open and drooling. He's completely passed out.

His window isn't open either.

Shouta's too good of a hero to relax before completely securing the apartment, but he can feel some of his stress drain away. He reaches out to pat Izuku's hair, an equally affectionate and relieved action - and Izuku doesn't move at all.

That's odd. He's normally like a sunflower searching for sun, clinging to the closest bit of warmth. Even in his sleep, he tends to cuddle close if he or Inko provide any amount of body heat.

He pauses and squints, looking closer.

Izuku drools when he sleeps. It's disgustingly endearing.

The pool of drool isn't directly under his chin. There's a strand dribbling down, on its way to building a new one, but when he feels around on Izuku's pillow, there's a still-wet spot on the opposite end of where his head's laying.

He probably just rolled over. That's the logical explanation.

He presses his hand to Izuku's forehead. It's warm - slightly feverish. He cups Izuku's face, which, in contrast, is colder than it should be considering how warm the room is and how warm his forehead is. Like he's clammy from spending too much time in the cool night air.

Shouta slowly walks to the window. It's closed.

Izuku just rolled over in his sleep - that has to be what he heard. Shouta was on high alert because he just came back from patrol, unexpectedly early due to Tsukauchi's appearance, and his instincts were off because of the schedule change. He heard Izuku moving - because his stupid All Might duvet is crinkly and as obnoxious as the man its based on, and Izuku sleeps with his door open since his room doesn't get a lot of air circulation, so that's how he heard it.

Izuku's forehead is warm because he's coming down with a summer cold. No big deal. His face is cold because he's not buried in his blankets for once. Probably because he's feverish. That's perfectly normal. He'll take some kids' tylenol when he wakes up and Shouta will stay home with him to make sure it's not the flu.

The window's closed.

The window's closed, it's going to be locked, and Shouta is overreacting.

He's being paranoid. No one was in the apartment. He's an old, paranoid, stupid bastard, and he's going to go back to bed thinking about how stupid he is.

He grabs the handle and tugs.

The night air is brisk and startlingly cold. It's almost as startling as the way his stomach falls into his feet, the way he can feel adrenaline shoot through his system like a drug, the sharp breath that he can't stop himself from inhaling quickly.

Shouta slides the window shut and crouches next to Izuku. He shakes him firmly - still gentle, since it's Izuku.

"Izuku," he says, voice wavering the slightest amount. "Izuku, wake up. Now."

Izuku grumbles and tries to roll over.

Shouta says, "Izuku," and even he doesn't recognize the tone he uses.

That with an extra shove has Izuku prying his eyes open finally. He croaks out, "Mr. 'Zawa? Izzit time for school?"

"Did you unlock your window?"

"Window?"

“Your window. Did you unlock it before you went to bed? Or while you were doing homework after dinner?”

Izuku squints over Shouta’s shoulder and slowly shakes his head. “Uh-uh. You told me not to. And Mama says that open windows make you nervous so we shouldn’t unless you’re in the room.”

Shouta flicks the window’s lock, knowing damn well it’s functionally useless at this point. He scoops Izuku up and cradles him close to his chest. “You’re staying in my room tonight,” he says quietly. “You and your mom. Let's go get her."

"Mmkay."

"Do you feel okay? You’re warm.”

“Tired.”

“Stay awake just a minute longer. You’re certain you didn’t unlock your window? Never?”

Izuku’s head flops onto his shoulder and he yawns. “Dunno. Don’t think so. ‘M tired though.”

“Okay. Okay.” Shouta barely takes a step before Izuku whines loudly. “What is it?”

“Want my scarf.”

“Your scarf…?”

Izuku points obligingly at his bed, where - sure enough - there’s his “Official Eraserhead” scarf. It’s bunched up into a ball that he must’ve been hugging like it’s a teddy bear. Any other time, Shouta would have to take a minute to process what that means.

Instead, he picks it up, places it in Izuku’s grabby hands, and stalks out of the room.

The only item he can grab with one hand that’ll do the job is a chair from the dining room. That is shoved underneath the room’s door handle - not anything that would stop someone who was able to break the window’s lock, but the door hitting against it will alert Shouta if they try again.

Next stop is Inko’s room. He doesn’t bother being quiet this time.

The door opening is enough to wake her up - Inko blearily says, “Izuku? Something wrong, baby?”

“Inko, I think someone tried to get into Izuku’s room. Or succeeded. I don’t know. His window was unlocked.”

“Shouta?” she scrubs at her eyes, sitting up and yawning almost identically to the way her son did. “What’re you talking about?”

“I heard something. I looked around. Izuku’s window was unlocked. He says he didn’t unlock it.”

Inko reaches over to her nightstand and clicks her lamp on. Her hair’s a rat’s nest on top of her head, her nightgown is slipping over one of her shoulders, and she has dried drool on her cheek. She scrubs at her eyes again and appears slightly more alert.

“Izuku, honey, did you hear anything?”

Izuku, eyes half-lidded, shakes his head.

“Did you unlock your window? It’s okay if you did. I know we told you not to, but we won’t be mad if you did.”

“I dunno. Maybe? ‘M tired. And hot.”

Inko motions for Shouta to come closer, then reaches out to hold her hand up to Izuku’s head. She frowns. “Baby, you’re burning up. Do you feel sick? Stomachache, itchy throat… does your head hurt?”

“Maybe a little.”

“Did you feel sick before you went to sleep?”

“Dunno. Can’t remember.”

Inko crawls out of her pillow fort. “Shouta, go ahead and lay Izuku down here. Head back to bed. I’m going to get him some fever reducer - he probably just opened the window himself before he fell asleep.”

“He said he didn’t.”

“He’s feverish. He probably opened it when his temperature started rising - you know how hot his room gets. Nothing was out of place in his room, right?”

Shouta says, “Inko, I - The window wasn’t opened when I went in

there. It was unlocked. Even if he opened it, why would he be closing it at three in the morning?"

"But nothing was out of place? Izuku, you didn't hear anyone other than me and Shouta?"

Izuku nods. "I didn't hear anyone. I pro'ly opened the window. Can I go to sleep?"

"Inko - "

"It's late," she says firmly. "It'll be less scary in the morning. Let's get some rest so we're thinking more rationally in the morning. You heard the wind or something else - that's all."

For some reason, hearing his own rationalizations out of her mouth pisses him off. He shouts, "Fuck's sake, Inko, I didn't make up some boogeyman to be scared of - I'm not a child! "

"No, but the sick child's currently being more reasonable than you are," she snaps. "It's late, Shouta. I have work tomorrow. Izuku has school if his fever goes down. You're crabby and paranoid since you never sleep enough and won't talk to anyone about anything that bothers you, and now you're projecting all of that crap onto a creaky old apartment building. We're *all* going to bed."

He presses his lips together firmly. Izuku's warm forehead presses against his collarbone.

"Now, Shouta. We'll talk in the morning."

Reluctantly, he puts Izuku down onto the bed. Pries the tiny hands off and pulls one of the covers up to tuck underneath his chin. Izuku's asleep before his head hits the pillow, mouth hanging open.

He follows her out and stands outside of the bathroom as she rummages through their box of medicine. He keeps one eye on her bedroom, making sure he can hear Izuku's snuffly breaths.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap."

"I wouldn't imagine something like this. We should see if Hizashi or Nemuri would let us stay with them for the night."

"We're not bothering them at three in the morning because you think someone *might've* tried to break in."

“‘Might’ve’ - why else would his window be unlocked? We both have told him before to keep it locked and shut - “

“He’s eight!” Inko says, clearly exasperated. She tosses a bottle of cold medicine into the trash - probably expired - and gives him a sardonic look. “Izuku’s a good boy. He’s smart. That doesn’t mean he won’t forget rules that he thinks are dumb. If he wanted his window open bad enough, he’d open it, because he doesn’t understand why it’s such a bad thing to have an open window.”

“That’s not - “

“Hell, I don’t know why open windows are such a problem,” she mutters. “We’re not exactly rolling in cash, so it’s not like someone’s going to target our apartment for a robbery. Hisashi said that he wasn’t interested in getting involved in our lives any more than he already is, so it wasn't something with him.”

“Oh, and suddenly you believe him? You cry to me over how he treated you and Izuku, then one phone call where he claims - “

Inko perks up, like a hunting dog that caught a scent. “Is that what this is all about? You’ve been on edge since Izuku’s birthday - is it because of that phone call?”

“What?” he blinks. “I haven’t been on edge.”

“Bullshit.”

“I haven’t!”

“Bullshit!” she laughs humorlessly. Finally, she pulls up the small pack of purple tylenol - faux-grape-flavored, like kids will take that better than generic-flavored medicine. “You’ve been high-strung and grumpy for weeks. It’s amazing that this is the first meltdown you’ve had.”

Shouta - legitimately - has no idea what she’s talking about.

His confusion must be painfully obvious, because she rolls her eyes and starts counting on her fingers. “You’ve been on Izuku’s case about Katsuki almost constantly. You triple-check that the door is locked every night. You won’t sleep until I get back on Friday nights and last week you texted me five times when I was running late.”

“Okay, I get it - “

“You won’t take Izuku to the art store even though he’s asked you four times - “

“That one I have a completely valid reason! I told you there was a weird guy there last time - “

“And what are the chances he’ll be there again?” she demands. “He was there once. *Once* , Shouta. And from what you were saying, he might’ve just been trying to be friendly. It didn’t sound like the evil scheming mastermind of whatever villain that you seem to be afraid of lurking around every corner!”

Shouta doesn’t say anything. He crosses his arms and leans against the doorway, and he picks a point on the opposite wall to stare at instead of looking at Inko.

She sighs heavily. “I’m not trying to pressure you. But clearly something’s on your mind, and if you won’t talk to me about it, then I’m flying blind and have to assume you’re just being an ass out of nowhere.”

“I’m not - That’s not. Inko, I’m not trying to - “

“I know. Doesn’t change the fact that I’m getting to the end of my rope about this. I’ve already had a boyfriend that pulled the possessive, overprotective schtick. I don’t need you doing the same damn thing just because you can’t handle your paranoia.”

Shouta’s throat clicks as he swallows nothing.

Inko’s lips are pressed tightly together. Unrelenting, she waits until he meets her eyes. “I don’t know if something happened at work, if it’s about Hisashi, or if this is related to what keeps you up at night. But whatever it is - You need to talk to someone, Shouta. It doesn’t have to be me, but I know you’re not talking to Nemuri or Hizashi about this either.”

He startles a little. “How...?”

“We have a groupchat,” she says unapologetically. “They send me pictures of you guys in high school, I let them know that you’re not dead even if you’re not answering their texts.”

“Of course. And my - as you put it - ‘grumpiness’ came up?”

“Hizashi’s worried about you. We all are, but he’s the only one not

annoyed by your bullshit.”

“Thanks.”

Inko gets to her feet, stretches her arms overhead, and leans over to pull him into a tight, motherly hug. “I love you very, very much Shouta. But it’s almost four in the freaking morning and I’m very exhausted. I’m allowed to be annoyed with you.”

Shouta wants to snark back. He can think of ten witty, dry retorts that would make Inko laugh and let go of him.

But - the kicker is - she’s right. He didn’t know it, but he has been on edge.

He still thinks there’s something up with Izuku’s window. He’ll get a better lock tomorrow - maybe some sensors too, to let him know the minute it’s opened - and deal with it later, even if Inko thinks this is just him being paranoid.

He has been more stressed than he was willing to admit even to himself, though. Between his friends' weirdness, Izuku's sudden reticence to talking about anything non-hero-related, and his Shigaraki investigations, he's got a lot going on. He hadn't thought that Hisashi Midoriya was something he was overly concerned with, but t rying to figure out if Hisashi is a threat - if his strangely ominous phone call was just a regular criminal lowlife who doesn’t know how to be a father, or if it was indicative of someone who can and will hurt the Midoriyas - is scarier than he thought it would be.

Weirdly enough, he feels more afraid of Hisashi than he does of Shigaraki. At least he *knows* Shigaraki. That’s a face that’s forever imprinted in his brain, a face that pops up in his nightmares, a face that he would never mistake for anyone else. If he sees gray hair, cracked skin, red eyes, and that eerie, terrible grin, he knows to do *something* , even if it’s just running in the opposite direction.

Hisashi could pass him on the street tomorrow, and Shouta would never know. Hisashi could walk past Izuku - and Shouta wouldn’t know.

He can’t protect Izuku from someone like that.

He can’t protect Izuku from the boogeyman.

He clutches Inko tight, hugging her like she’s a lifeline. He has to fold

over to reach her, has to fold even further to bury his face in her neck, and he takes a trembling, careful breath. She smells like sweat and a cheap perfume that he knows Izuku picked out for her ages ago because the bottle was shaped like a star. Her hair is knotted and will be a bitch for her to brush tomorrow.

“I’m sorry,” Shouta says, voice catching on the tail end of a sob. “I just want you two to be safe. I don’t want to lose - I can’t. I can’t. Not again. I’m sorry.”

“Shouta - “

“I’m sorry.”

“Hey. Hey, hon, it’s okay. I know. You’re okay.” She rubs a hand between his shoulder blades, shushing him gently. “Come on. We’ll have a sleepover in my room. My bed can hold all three of us if we squish. That’ll make you feel better, right? To have me and Izuku in one spot?”

Inko reads him uncomfortably well. And even though it makes him a little ashamed, he nods into her shoulder.

“Okay. Come on. Let’s go to bed.”

things were never going to be easy, but it'd be nice if there was less vomit involved

Chapter Summary

A sick day and an unexpected visitor.

Chapter Notes

i don't have much to say as the author right now - having kind of a rough day but wanted to post anyway since it's been a bit since i last did. i can't stay away from this for too long~

thank you for your support and for enjoying this fic <3 it's something that's made the last few months a lot more bearable for me. hope you're all enjoying and like the bit of suspense from last chapter~

Shouta can't talk about what's really bothering him to anyone. It's not like he can go up to Hizashi and Nemuri and say, "So, I'm stressed because I'm from decades in the future where society as we know it was on the verge of collapse. A guy named Shigaraki was somehow handed dozens of quirks from his mentor, this weird guy named All for One who was All Might's evil nemesis and who was barely - barely, I cannot stress how barely - ended by All Might's last Hail-Mary attack. Yeah, All Might's nemesis? He looked like a kitten in comparison to his protege. Shigaraki used his gifted powers and a lot of unethical scientists to create super soldier monsters called Nomu that obliterated any opposition. Kids with 'useful' quirks were taken from their families to either become soldiers themselves or have their quirks stolen to enhance Nomu. There weren't many of us left by the end, because not many pros have the stomach to kill things that look like children, let alone actual children that were brainwashed or threatened into acting on Shigaraki's orders. All Might, thanks to many of his Big Spotlight Hero contacts, had saved notes about a theoretical way to go back in time before he kicked the bucket, and through determination and luck, we got it to work, and then everyone but me got themselves brutally murdered at the last minute, so I was the only one who could go back that wouldn't be shoved into the body of a child. And now I'm trying to stop that all from happening, obviously."

Not only is it a mouthful, but Shouta thinks he'd actually have an

aneurysm if he said any of that out loud. He's been repressing the trauma from the first time around as deeply as he can manage, and he isn't ready to unpack even a quarter of that just yet. His heart might actually give out from the shock of having to confront his actions during the almost-apocalypse.

It isn't a bad idea for him to talk about what he can, though.

He hadn't realized how much the mystery of Hisashi was weighing on him until Inko pointed it out, and that is a topic he can easily recruit his two buffoons into helping with.

When Inko's alarm goes off, all three of them moan and groan like they're extras in a zombie movie. Inko and Izuku both look like they fit the part - Shouta already toes the line between "homeless man" and "walking dead" on his best days, so he assumes he looks equally terrible. As Inko gets ready, Izuku falls back asleep almost immediately and Shouta heads to his room to get his phone.

It's weirdly nerve wracking to open his messaging app and send one to Hizashi and Nemuri. Their respective strange behaviors towards the end of summer have him feeling apprehensive, but there's no one else he would want to go to with his problems. He might've, once, gone to Yagi - both because the man has too much "good" in him to judge Shouta for any of his more distasteful opinions, and because as much as Shouta hates All Might, Yagi had a veritable mountain of knowledge and experience that most pro-heroes never get.

If Yagi was here instead of Shouta, things would be moving a lot faster. Yagi probably would've known how to find Shigaraki. Yagi also wouldn't have been able to take Shigaraki out before he became a threat, but at least it wouldn't be Shouta's problem anymore.

He finally decides to keep it brief. ' *r u guys free 2night? could use a hangout if yes.* '

There's almost no chance they'll answer before noon. Nemuri has late shifts - the R-rated hero can't exactly be broadcasted on daytime TV - which means she doesn't normally wake up until ten at the earliest. Hizashi's never been much of a morning person either and only started waking up before noon when he became a teacher. If he was ever going to follow Inko's advice, though, he had to send the request before he woke up enough to talk himself out of it.

With that sorted out, he slides on a pair of sweatpants and shoves his phone into his pocket.

He walks back out and leans against Inko's door frame, frowning when he sees her leaning over Izuku and moving his hair back. "Is his fever gone?"

She shakes her head. "It's better than it was, but he's still warm. Are you able to stay in today and keep an eye on him?"

"Sure. I have work tonight but I can hold off on leaving until you get back."

"I left the tylenol out on the counter - he can have more at eight. Let him sleep as much as he wants, and today is the *only* day he can have as many of your weird jelly packs as he wants. They'll at least keep him hydrated."

"Joy oh joy."

"I doubt he'll want to eat. His appetite's always the first thing to go when he gets sick." Inko sighs heavily and presses a soft kiss to Izuku's forehead. "Call me if you need anything."

"You got it."

With that, Inko heads out to start her day and Shouta crawls back into bed. One of Izuku's eyes crack open when Shouta gets underneath the covers, but it slides shut almost immediately and he doesn't react outside of wiggling a little bit closer.

Shouta pulls his phone out to set an alarm to have Izuku take another dose of medicine and, after a moment of deliberation, hesitantly wraps an arm around him, tugging him closer. Izuku willingly tucks himself under Shouta's chin with a gentle snuffle.

It's like holding a tiny space heater. Poor kid must be feeling rough.

On the bright side, a slow day in bed sounds like a dream come true to him. Having Izuku in arm's reach all day after last night's scare - even better. Taking care of Izuku and making sure the kid doesn't boil his brain away is barely a hardship in light of that. He has more than his fair share of experience in comforting sick kids thanks to U.A.'s dorm system, and Deku was one of the less annoying brats when he caught a bug.

No one could ever compare to Tokoyami, what with his drama and utter despair whenever he caught a cold. Tiny Izuku won't be difficult to handle.

He's about to settle in fully when his phone buzzes with an incoming text. The screen is bright in the room, even with the sun starting to peek in from behind the curtains. He carefully tilts it away from Izuku's face, trying not to disturb him.

Hizashi texted him already. And he sent it just to him, rather than responding in the group chat.

' *everything okay? what's going on?* '

One-handed texting is a skill he acquired through a long period of trial-and-error and was recently prioritized when Izuku decided holding his hand while walking is of utmost importance. He puts it to use now.

'i can't miss my friends and want to hang out? yeesh.'

'shouta.'

'it's nothing important. just wanted to see u guys,'

'u never choose to hang out. we drag u places and u tolerate us. c'mon. what's up?'

Shouta leans back and sighs heavily through his nose. He frequently forgets how sharp Hizashi is when he isn't distracted by his own issues. He's not on Nedzu's level of intelligence, but he's smarter than people give him credit for. He isn't arrogant about it, no matter how flashy he is in every other aspect of his life, so it's easy to forget.

'i'm stressed and inko finally lost her patience w/me. told me to talk about it w/someone or she'd kick my ass.'

'inko said that?'

'the ass-kicking was implied.'

'not sure whether to be relieved that someone can get through that thick skull of urs that we're there for u or concerned that ur stressed enough that someone risked ur wrath to tell u to get ur shit together.'

'it's not that bad. just a lot going on.'

'if u need anything, i'm more than willing to help. just tell me where to hide the body.'

'not sure if i should be offended that u think i'm not competent enough to

hide a body myself.'

'of course u can - i'd just be the emotional support, baby.'

Shouta's stomach flutters for the barest, briefest second.

He can't think of any response that won't be gut-wrenchingly inappropriate or awkward. He stares at his phone blankly, mind full of static and fuzz that he can't parse out. And in front of the static and fuzz is a wall of confusion and inability to understand why, exactly, he's suddenly incapable of looking away from an innocuous message that isn't any different than any others Hizashi's sent in the past.

A few seconds later, a message comes into the group chat. He quickly exits their messages to open that one.

'course shou! party @ my place, ten-ish? nem u gotta get ur own ride but shou i can pick u up from the station if u want'

He sends some sort of confirmation before deciding there's been way, way too much activity when he's gotten about an hour of sleep total in the last two days. He drops his phone onto Inko's nightstand and curls around Izuku again, letting his breathing soothe him into sleep.

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Waking up is unpleasant.

Izuku is shaking him and saying, "Mr. 'Zawa, my tummy hurts," and

there's someone rapping on their front door like they're trying to practice their jackhammer impression. Shouta makes the poor decision to not immediately get up. Someone who's a real threat wouldn't bother knocking, let alone so obnoxiously. Izuku's not immediately injured. He thinks he has five seconds to respond and start the day when, in reality, he has three.

1. He squeezes his eyes shut and pretends he isn't as tired as he feels.
2. Whoever's knocking on the door has started yelling as well.
3. Izuku hurls all over Shouta's chest.

He deserves it. He can't even bring himself to react outside of lazily opening his eyes and sighing.

Izuku, to no one's surprise, starts crying immediately.

"It's okay," Shouta says groggily, sitting up and ignoring the chunks of - whatever - that are rolling off of him onto Inko's floral duvet. It's a weird green color, bringing into question what the *fuck* Izuku ate last night. "You're okay. Let's get you cleaned up and get you some more medicine. Okay?"

"I-I'm sorry," he wails, scrubbing at his eyes. "I feel really bad and sick and cold and and and I wanna go back to *sleep* Mr. 'Zawa."

"It's alright. You can go back to bed in just a few. We'll clean you up and get you tucked in." He goes to pick Izuku up, then remembers his chest is covered in puke. He pries his tank top off and wipes as much of the mess up as he can before tossing it on the ground.

As clean as he's going to get without a shower, he picks Izuku up and runs a hand through his sweaty hair. His forehead is warm, but it's still not as bad as it had been the night before. Izuku curls into his chest and cries louder.

"Alright, alright. It's okay. I got you." He rubs Izuku's back and slowly walks out of the room, trying not to jostle him too much. "I need you to sit in the bathroom for just a minute while I deal with whoever's at the door. I'll deal with it quickly, I promise."

Izuku, the little trooper that he is, nods miserably into his shoulder. He's clearly unhappy when Shouta deposits him onto the small rug that Inko keeps in front of the sink, but he puts on his brave face and wipes some of his tears away. Shouta gives his head a gentle pat and repeats, "I'll deal with it quickly."

Whoever it is has continued to knock, loudly and obnoxiously calling out for, “Shouta Aizawa, I know you’re home!”

Great.

He flings the front door open and snarls, “What. Is. It.”

To his displeasure, Detective Tsukauchi has decided that waiting for an appropriate, professional meeting wasn’t quick enough for his tastes. Must be some of All Might’s “top hero” entitlement rubbing off on him.

The man’s dressed more casually than he was the day before - in that he’s not wearing a tie, but has all the other fixings of a suit underneath a drab brown trench coat. He has the audacity to look shocked at Shouta’s appearance - or, maybe, it’s his state of disarray and undress that has him bewildered.

“Well?”

Tsukauchi’s eyes slowly rise to meet his, his face oddly flushed. Shouta assumes it’s either from how loudly he was exerting himself to try to get him to open the door or from embarrassment at getting caught being such an obnoxious asshole. He clears his throat and says authoritatively, “Mr. Aizawa, we need to discuss how you came across your lead for the Kai Chisaki arrest. It’s of vital importance to national security.”

“I already told you, I’d be in the office at nine. Or ten. Whenever the fuck I told you I’d be there. Harassing me at home isn’t the best way to get me to cooperate.”

“It’s funny that you thought I believed you’d willingly cooperate at any point. The question is, why are you so adamant to avoid me?”

“I’m not avoiding you,” Shouta lies, taking perverse pleasure at the way Tsukauchi’s face spasms. “Prove it.”

“If you would just talk to me for fifteen minutes - “

“No thanks.”

“I can arrest you for obstruction of justice.”

“I can arrest you for trespassing - how did you get my address, anyway?” he asks mildly. “It isn’t documented anywhere that you

should have access to, and not many people at all know that I've moved. Stalking, harassment… Those are things that All Might's main man shouldn't have on his record, should he?"

That was stupid to say.

Shouta knows it was stupid the moment it leaves his mouth.

Tsukauchi's eyes widen, then narrow in deep suspicion. Shouta barely has time to realize how badly he's fucked up before Tsukauchi's asking, "What, exactly, do you think I have to do with All Might of all people?"

Shit.

"You have the same 'golden boy' aura he has, and it'd be moronic to think that All Might gets away with half the shit he does without some police contacts," he says calmly. "Given your persistence and the talk of 'national security' - what other hero can throw around their actions and justify it by claiming it's to do with 'national security'? Endeavor's too busy worrying about his popularity, the rest of the top ten are buffoons who are only good for punching what the Hero Commission tells them to - And, since heroes police heroes, what other authority would you be working under to bother me about an otherwise unremarkable operation?"

It's risky. He's phrasing these as questions, interspersed with sardonic comments and facts that *are* truthful.

Something he hurriedly spat out relaxes the tension in Tsukauchi's shoulders. He doesn't look pleased - far from it - but he's less of a tightly strung spring. Shouta makes sure his posture and expression don't change.

"Now - can you get the fuck out of my apartment? I'm busy."

Tsukauchi says, "Like you were busy yesterday? I'll believe it when I see it."

Shouta says, "Oh fuck off, like you - " and is cut off by the sound of tiny shuffling feet behind him.

He spins around to see Izuku come into the front entryway. His hair is wild and he's visibly sweating. He sobs, "Mr. 'Zawa I drank some water but everything feels terrible - Can I please go back to bed? I'm cold and tired and - and - and -"

“Hey, buddy, shh - “

Izuku’s face, already pale and slightly green, somehow pales further. Shouta lurches forward and says, “Izuku, bathroom - !” but it’s too late. Izuku hunches over and coughs up whatever water he had managed to choke down, along with whatever bile was still in his stomach.

It’s still that weird green color. Shouta hopes WikiHow has a cleaning solution that can handle fluorescent green puke on white carpet, but he hopes harder that Inko wasn’t too attached to their security deposit.

Izuku’s face twists in absolute misery. He hiccups and gags, face covered in snot and slimy bile.

It’s absolutely pitiful. Shouta can’t help himself from rushing forward to scoop him up, rubbing a hand up and down his back as soothingly as he can.

“Alright, it’s okay. Take a deep breath, ‘Zuku. It’s okay. We’ll get you into bed soon.”

“T-that’s what you said a million minutes ago!” he wails. He flings his arms around Shouta’s neck and hugs him tightly. “Everything’s terrible!”

Izuku has passed “crying” and is now full into “bawling.”

Shouta turns to Detective Tsukauchi, whose face is suddenly the definition of cowed and ashamed. He raises an eyebrow and asks, faux-politely, “May I please be excused from answering your oh-so-important questions to tend to my sick kid? Or would you like to talk about this while we all stew in the stench of fresh vomit?”

Tsukauchi scrubs the back of his head sheepishly. “Er. I see you have other commitments.”

“Yeah. Obviously.”

“This *is* important,” he says, abruptly serious. “I’m not kidding when I say it’s important on a national scale. Can we please set time aside tonight before your patrol to discuss? It was inappropriate of me to come to your home. I apologize for overstepping professional boundaries.”

Shouta would like to make him squirm longer. But Izuku is a heavy weight in his arms, bawling and miserable, and he's an equally heavy reminder that Shouta should at least attempt to be a better hero than he is.

It's selfish to punish Tsukauchi for the threat he poses to Shouta's comfort. He shouldn't expect a smooth ride to saving the world. If he can't handle Tsukauchi's questioning, he won't stand a chance against Shigaraki.

On the other hand, Tsukauchi's a cop. And Shouta really, really hates working with cops.

Izuku tightens his hold, and Shouta sighs.

"Yeah, whatever. I have a commitment at ten. I'm assuming two hours will be plenty of time for you to pick my brain."

Tsukauchi blinks. "Certainly," he says cautiously. He clearly disbelieves Shouta's sudden change in attitude. "I'll see you at the station at eight."

Shouta gives him a wide, forced grin. "Great. Now get out."

interlude: loving the sacrificial lamb is the stupidest thing you can possibly do, but all parents are fools

Chapter Summary

> The weight of the world rests on tiny shoulders. Shouta is not proud to have put it there.

Chapter Notes

> this is a very short chapter b/c i wanted this scene to be included but it didn't go with the last chapter or the next chapter so. we're calling it an "interlude" even though it's just a really short chapter lmao.
>
> the next chapter where things actually happen is already written so i'll have that up in the next day or two when i get around to editing it properly~ hopefully you're not all too bummed by it being so short.
>
> you are all so incredibly sweet and i'm so so so so SO grateful to have so many kind readers <3 thank you all for your kind words and well-wishes. i do love the trend of "we will blame AFO for EVERYTHING" i'm seeing in the comment section, it's absolutely cracking me up~
>
> hope you all enjoy~! thank you for reading <3

Izuku being sick - it's not that much different from the times in the past where Shouta's had to comfort him or any of his other students over the years. In the past year alone, Shouta's had to wipe away more Midoriya tears than there's water in the ocean, so it's not anything new to gently bounce on the balls of his feet and whisper reassurances to the kid.

But some wires in his brain are getting crossed - maybe because of the possible break-in, maybe because of how disgustingly terrible Izuku's illness is, maybe Shouta's own stress and exhaustion is finally getting to him - and Shouta can't deal with the way his entire chest *aches* at how miserable Izuku is. He remembers the first time Eri was sick under his care, how she kept such a brave face and never complained - but her glassy eyes and sniffling nose, the way she clung to him and

refused to let him out of her sight - and there's no difference between how he felt then and how he feels now.

Except Izuku isn't his son. He's not Eri, who had no one and needed Shouta. Shouta isn't a parent (anymore.)

(He can't go through that heartbreak again.)

And yet -

And yet he can't put Izuku down. Something about Izuku's misery makes it seem insurmountable to force the kid to stand on his own, and Shouta wants to punch his past self for thinking that Tokoyami's nonsense would be worse than seeing Izuku dry-heaving as Shouta urges him out of his sweaty pajamas.

He finally strips Izuku down and walks into the shower in his boxers, not giving a damn about the way the lukewarm water immediately soaks through them. Izuku whines, "It's cold."

"I know," he soothes, getting Izuku's hair wet and scrubbing. "But when your temperature's as high as it is, we can't have a hot shower. I'll be quick."

Izuku doesn't fuss while Shouta washes him, but he silently cries the entire time. Shouta tries to keep his motions soft and doesn't draw out the torture longer than he has to - the minute they're both mostly clean, he shuts the faucet off and wraps Izuku in the fuzziest towel they have.

For once, Izuku has no preference about what he wears, so Shouta grabs the first pair of pajamas he finds in his room - the Present Mic ones - and gets him dressed as quickly as possible. While he does that, Izuku's carefully choking down children's Tylenol like it's bitter poison, making a face every few seconds.

"Do you want something to eat?"

Izuku, lips slightly purple from the sticky medicine, shakes his head viciously.

"Not even one of my jelly packs? I'll let you have one of the lychee ones."

He shakes his head again.

“Alright. I’ll get you some water to sip on and then you can go back to sleep in my room while I clean up your mom’s bed. That sound good?”

Izuku nods.

Shouta picks him up again and makes to leave the bathroom, when Izuku gently tugs on his hair to get his attention. “Hm?”

“Can you please get my scarf from Mama’s room?”

His scarf. Which almost definitely has at least a little bit of vomit on it from earlier.

Shouta forces himself not to sigh. “Yeah. I’ll clean it off real quick then bring it in to you. That alright?”

Izuku nods into his shoulder. He clings a little bit when Shouta lowers him onto the bed, until Shouta wraps him in his yellow blanket and urges him to lie back.

“Start warming this up for me, okay? I want to be nice and toasty when I come back to nap with you.”

Izuku blearily asks, “You use it?”

“The blanket you gave me?” Shouta clarifies. At Izuku’s slow nod, he says, “Of course. It’s cozy.”

“You like it?”

“I do. Thank you for getting it for me.”

His eyes are already drooping. He yawns. “I really like you, Mr. ‘Zawa. ‘m sorry I threw up on you.”

Shouta scrubs a hand over Izuku’s hair gently. “It’s alright. Focus on feeling better.”

By the time he’s dug Izuku’s scarf out from the twisted bedding on Inko’s bed, stripped the bed of its sheets to deal with later, and washed enough of the vomit off of the gray fabric to not feel bad about handing it to a sick kid, Izuku’s conked out and snoring. He’s curled up under Shouta’s blanket and clutching the edges of it with two pudgy little hands.

The same thing in his chest that aches at Izuku’s misery feels like it’s

been set on fire when it hits him that this tiny thing - this pitiful, sick, innocent child - at one point grew up to become Deku.

Deku: the Determined Hero. Deku: the Powerhouse Hero. Deku: the Kind Hero.

(Deku: the Dead Hero, the Martyr, the symbol that they all rallied behind, the hero whose name became a war cry, the boy who just wanted to be a hero and Shouta was one of many people who told him “no, you can’t,” until he proved them all wrong and died in the process.)

This is the kid that Shouta’s hinging the entire future on.

Whether Izuku becomes Deku this time around or someone completely new - it doesn’t matter. Shouta’s put most of his eggs in this tiny basket.

If Shouta can’t stop Shigaraki, Izuku’s his backup. Training him, being there to watch and guide him as he grows - part of it is because Shouta wants to and has tripped headfirst into loving this kind boy who deserves the world, but his ultimate ulterior motive is to make sure there’s someone leagues stronger and smarter than Shouta to save the world if he fails again.

This small, kind, stupidly smart kid.

He carefully tucks the slightly damp scarf into the crook of Izuku’s arm, smooths a hand over his brow, and tries desperately not to choke on the terror that’s crawling up his throat.

anonymous source

Chapter Summary

Tsukauchi finally gets to ask his questions.

Chapter Notes

~i forgot how long this chapter was until i pasted it into ao3 but hoo boy this is a chunky buddy!!!~

lotsa plot stuff happening in this chapter, lotsa insight into what shouta's been doing Off Stage, lotsa lotsa LOTSA stuff - hopefully it'll make up for the shortness and #feels of ch24 lmao. i'd been dying to post this one since i finished so even though i just posted 24, i couldn't help myself and had to post this too <3

this fic's really becoming kind of a monster. i hadn't realized how long this had gotten until i was re-reading it for what i'm writing now to make sure i'm not contradicting myself, and it took me WAY longer to get through it than i thought it would. and so many of you have been reading since i first posted??? back in june??? just. wow.

i'm a little emotional about it for some weird reason. appreciative as fuck, and just generally emotional. thank you all for reading, commenting, and just generally making this an enjoyable project to work on <3

Izuku is less than pleased when Shouta leaves for work.

And by “less than pleased,” Shouta really means, “throws a tantrum the likes of which the world has never witnessed before.”

Inko shuffles him out the door, rolling her eyes as Izuku wails like he’s getting murdered. “You don’t have to worry so much. He’s fine.”

Shouta glances over her shoulder and frowns. “I can stay if he’s going to be this upset. It’s not like I can’t afford to miss a day.“

“You’re a softie,” she coos, reaching up to pinch his cheek. “But I know you made plans with Nemmy and Hizashi, and you’ve been doing more childcare than I have lately. I’m grateful, and you save me a ton of money on not having to pay for daycare - but that means you definitely need a break.”

“It’s not a big deal. I can take a break when he’s feeling better.“

“Go,” she says firmly. Her hair’s pulled back away from her face, her blouse’s sleeves are rolled up, and she has the look of a mother ready to go to war for her child. Or, in the current situation: ready to soothe a frayed temper after a day of sick misery.

He hesitates anyway, which makes Inko give him an exasperated sigh.

“Just - if you hear anything. Or need anything. You’ll call me?”

Inko politely doesn’t call him crazy for still thinking about the open window from the night before. She says, “Of course. Now - get going.”

Shouta feels like he’s abandoning a fallen comrade, listening to the way Izuku’s absolute devastation echoes off of their walls, the sobbed, “I d-d-don’t w-want M-M-Mr. ‘Zawa to leave!” It’s more difficult for him to nod and let Inko close the door behind him than he thought it would be.

Holy separation anxiety, Batman.

It shouldn’t surprise him at this point that Izuku’s latched onto him with the ferocity of a starving dog faced with a ribeye. The only meaningful time they’ve been apart from each other, outside of when Izuku’s asleep, is during the school day. Consistent positive attention from a pro-hero he looks up to - obviously Izuku would cling, especially when he’s feeling as wretched as he is.

It doesn’t help that Shouta’s been just as clingy all day, concerned about his sudden illness and jumping at every noise that might be their mysterious intruder returning.

After tonight, he’ll pick up some extra shifts. Toe the line between pro-hero and bounty hunter, get some extra cash, and use that to cobble together some sort of alarm system. It’ll put his mind at ease, and it’s something that will hopefully be Inko-approved and won’t remind her of Hisashi’s suffocating behavior. It stung more than he cares to admit to be compared to the pseudo-husband that hurt her.

Just like it isn’t Tsukauchi’s problem that he’s a threat to Shouta’s precarious position in the past, it isn’t Inko’s problem to accept Shouta’s paranoia when it’s infringing on her comfort. She deserves to live her life unhindered and not annoyed at - or worse, afraid of - the homeless man she opened her home to.

He'll cook dinner for the next week. That, in addition to him being less of a suspicious bastard, should be enough to get him back in her good graces.

His decision coincides with his arrival at the police station. It's bustling today, with the boys-in-blue running around like chickens with their heads cut off.

Shouta raises an eyebrow at the hubbub.

A newbie is in the process of digging through the desk closest to him, visibly frantic and throwing random junk this way and that. Some guy who likely was dragged in hours ago to be booked and processed is seated with his hands cuffed, dozing and startling whenever one of the officers runs by with arms full of files. Everyone else is arguing, on their cell phones, or jabbing at their computers with visible frustration.

"Eraserhead - thanks for showing up," comes from the left. Shouta turns just enough to meet Tsukauchi's eyes. The man looks less than impressed with the chaos around him. If he was any less professional, Shouta thinks he'd be sneering. "The station, apparently, is mid-cyber attack. Someone hacked into their local file system and is deleting records left and right. They're trying to find out if there's a quirk involved or just a really good hacker."

Shouta blinks. "A data breach," he repeats. "Any idea what the attacker is looking for?"

Tsukauchi rolls his eyes. "It's probably just a punk causing trouble. If they'd calm down, they'd realize the attack's not actually taking anything - just deleting and adding nonsense. I tried to take a look and help, but the chief wasn't happy that an 'outsider' was there to 'potentially take advantage of their current weakness.'"

"Chief Otsuka is very protective," Shouta says noncommittally. "So you don't think this is anything to worry about?"

"Like I said. The hacker's not actually exfiltrating anything - loss or exposure of data is the only thing that the station would be held accountable for and could face charges for. Them being stupid enough to get hacked is a problem, but not one that any court of law will fine them for unless it hinders their ability to prosecute criminals. They'll have to validate their files against whatever backups they have or replace the files entirely with the backups, hire someone to fix their shitty systems so it doesn't happen again, and do some damage control

with their image once this gets leaked to the public. Otherwise - it's not a big deal."

Except it sort of is a big deal, because *this didn't happen last time* .

Shouta has forgotten more than a lot of people ever learn. It comes with the territory of being a pro-hero that makes it to sixty-ish. He's forgotten plenty, but he wouldn't have forgotten a hacker that was ballsy enough to attack a major police station. Tsukauchi seems bizarrely unconcerned - actually, he seems downright disdainful of the police, as if they were professional chefs that had just admitted to never washing their hands before.

It's not something high on his priority list this time around, but his past self would've been perhaps a tenth as concerned as the officers freaking out are.

He can't think of anything that he's changed that would directly cause a hacker to attack the police station - let alone in such a seemingly useless way. Maybe he arrested someone he didn't last time, and their allies are seeking revenge. Maybe it's a weird butterfly effect thing that resulted from him not ordering coffee when he normally would.

Maybe Shouta's changed more than he thought.

There's nothing to do about it now. So he asks, "Are we talking about Overhaul or has the general mayhem dissuaded you from this crap?"

Tsukauchi says, "Certainly not. I've spent long enough tracking you down, I'm not letting you leave now. Follow me - I've had one of the conference rooms reserved all day."

"All day?"

"I need to work somewhere, and Otsuka is too much a fan of inconveniencing me to let me use one of his off-duty officer's desks."

Sounds like the chief. Shouta, thankfully, rarely has to deal with that temperamental man.

The conference room is just big enough for a table and four chairs. Two of the chairs are filled with miscellaneous items - a briefcase, a jacket, a convenience store bag, and a duffel bag. The table's holding paper, pens, a closed laptop, three empty coffee cups, and half of a bagel.

Shouta takes the seat closest to the door and waits for Tsukauchi to get settled. The detective grabs one of the many notebooks scattered across the table and the closest pen, clicks the pen open, and looks at Shouta expectantly.

“What do you want to know?”

Tsukauchi starts asking the basics. Name, age, current residence, date of the operation in question - questions that make sense if he was trying to calibrate his truth detecting quirk. They’re questions that both of them easily know the answer to, so assuming that Tsukauchi’s Lie Detector reacts similarly to other detection-type quirks, it’ll be easy for him to tell the difference between a truth and a lie with such a clear baseline.

He deals with it, because he doesn’t have a choice at this point. Against his will, his eyes dart to the clock on the wall in the futile hope that two hours magically passed in the blink of an eye.

The low ball questions come to an end quickly enough. Tsukauchi swaps his pen out for another one since the ink had been running out for the last three questions, and he asks, “Now - how did you first come in contact with the Shie Hassaikai? This wasn’t a case you were hired for, correct?”

“I wasn’t hired for this case.” He pauses for a beat too long, his uncertainty rising. “I was investigating a personal matter. My - roommate?” It barely encompasses what Inko is to him, but it makes the most sense in this situation. “My roommate’s ex has been rumored to be involved in illegal dealings. I was hoping to get a lead.”

Not a lie. He was looking for any lead - either about Hisashi, Shigaraki, or All for One. He was *hoping* for information about Hisashi, though.

“I ended up at The Beehive, just scoping it out. It’s a club I’ve been to frequently when working undercover, but I didn’t know it was run by the Shie Hassaikai. I had heard of them, but I didn’t think they were powerful enough to run any sort of reputable business.”

“You had? Heard of them, I mean.”

“Here and there,” Shouta says vaguely. “A friend of a friend of a colleague was tracking them down for awhile.”

“I see.”

“While I was there, a man and a young woman caught my attention. I assumed it was some sort of sugar daddy thing, not anything untoward but - “ his throat catches against his will. “She reminded me of someone. Important. Someone important to me. I wouldn’t normally involve myself, but I had to make sure she was okay.”

Not a lie. He hasn’t lied. Tsukauchi’s watching him closely, but there hasn’t been any irritated twitching just yet.

“Rei introduced himself and Alana - his actual daughter, not an ‘arrangement’ or anything like that - to me when I approached their table. Offered to buy me a drink. While he went to get that, I asked Alana if she was alright. Told her I was a hero and could help her leave if she needed help.”

It was weird seeing a grown-up version of Eri laugh so hard. Shouta never heard her so much as chuckle, let alone laugh like someone had tickled her funny bone.

“She said I was cute. When Rei returned, she told him. He mocked me.”

What she said was: “Papa, look - a nobody hero thinks I need saving! Isn’t that just adorable~?”

Rei said, “A gentleman hero! I had you pegged as one from the start. Might want to work on that gait of yours - it’s much too recognizable. Criminal mutts aren’t as well-trained as you show dogs are, you know?”

Shouta’s a better spy than that - he had been looking to get caught, wanted to look like he was out of his depth and like an inexperienced idiot on their first mission. He wasn’t trying to hide or blend in.

It never hurts to let people think they have the upper-hand though, so he let his eyes widen and tried not to look as apathetic as he felt.

Tsukauchi asks, “What happened next?” and snaps Shouta out of his memory.

“We discussed an information exchange. I wanted to know more about them, they wanted to know what I was doing in their club. That’s how meetings like that go in the underground. Information’s valuable.”

“What did you tell them?”

Once he knew who they were? Once Rei threatened him with the full force of the Shie Hassaikai if Shouta tried to lie?

A lot.

He told them about Kai Chisaki's planned betrayal, information that only Chisaki would know (in this time) - implying that he had betrayed them, and his suspicions that there was activity that would look bad for respectable organized crime to be involved with. The last bit was a gamble that paid off ten times over.

The Shie Hassaikai never had a terrible reputation until it became fodder for Overhaul's insane plans, so it wasn't outside the realm of possibility that Rei would have a sense of honor. Chisaki's plans, his experimentation, and the trafficking - all of that would go against even a crime lord's sense of honor.

Most telling, though, was the fact that Rei is a *dad* . It was clear the way he spoke to Alana, the way he doted on her, and the way he looked at her. Fathers can be shitty people, of course, but Shouta had a suspicion that Rei wasn't complete scum. And parents that aren't scum, that are protective of their own children - they tend to have a soft spot for children in general. Shouta played on that assumption and talked specifically about Chisaki's dabbling in human experimentation using children as his fodder.

Obviously, they threatened him for insinuating that someone they thought of as family would betray them. Kicked him out of the club, blacklisted him, and told him to get lost or they'd hand his head over to the highest bidder.

Shouta gave them his number and said to call him if they wanted help cleaning house.

He had a text by that time the next day.

"I told them I was at the club investigating a matter unrelated to their family. Told them a description of the guy I was looking for - what little I know of the bastard," he mutters. "And I gave them rumors I had heard, mostly ones that I didn't have any evidence of. Whatever would keep their attention. Some of it they said they'd verify. They didn't tell me anything of importance."

"That's a lie."

"They told me items of importance to a personal matter," Shouta

corrects placidly. “Nothing relevant to you, Detective.”

Them confirming that they ran the Shie Hassaikai and knew Chisaki was plenty important at the time, considering it isn’t information he had the first time around - but it’s not anything new to Tsukauchi at this point.

“I left - “

“That’s another lie.”

“Was forced to leave,” he amends quickly. “They weren’t willing to extend their hospitality for as long as I would’ve liked. They also didn’t seem to appreciate my attitude.”

Tsukauchi scribbles something down. “So they forced you out for sassing them. Then what?”

“Wrote my report for the night. Stayed awake overthinking the entire thing. When the sun rose, took my roommate’s son to school as usual. Later that day, I received a text thanking me for the information I gave them from an unknown number. I guess something I told them - maybe the rumors about trafficking going around, maybe the description of someone wearing a purple boa, I have no idea what specifically did it - showed they had a traitor in their midst, because they gave me an address to a property that belonged to a subsidiary of the company that owns The Beehive.”

“And that means - “

“That means it was presumably a property that Rei had given to the traitor to conduct business with. Said traitor - who we now know is Chisaki - was using it for things Rei hadn’t approved of and was being sold out accordingly.”

“And that property was…?”

“The warehouse where the sting took place. I did some reconnaissance beforehand and scoped it out.” He squeezes his eyes shut and lets out a tight breath. “I’m sure you saw the pictures of the conditions the. Subjects. Were kept in. I brought the intel back as soon as possible and we started planning how to bring it down.”

“It was kept quiet,” Tsukauchi notes, flipping his laptop open. “The only reason I heard about Chisaki’s arrest is because I happened to have a friend staying at the same hospital half of the victims - and

Chisaki - were brought to." He clicks around for a few minutes, then turns the screen around for Shouta to see.

It's a picture of Chisaki in the hospital - his face swollen and covered in black and blue, his nose completely mangled, and an eerie blankness to his expression. One of his eyes is unfocused and drooping, while the other stares ahead dully. His brain takes a whole ten seconds to process what he's looking at, then he bites his tongue hard enough that he tastes blood immediately.

He remembers beating the crap out of him. He doesn't remember doing *that* much damage.

His stomach flips over unpleasantly. He swallows rapidly to clear his mouth of the saliva that had suddenly pooled there.

Tsukauchi doesn't miss the motion. He says, faux-casually, "I spoke to Chisaki while I was there. What else is an off-duty detective going to do while waiting for his friend to be discharged? And I'm nosy."

"Of course you are."

"He wasn't very chatty. But he said that the man who apprehended him came after him like it was personal." Tsukauchi leans forward, pushes the laptop another centimeter towards Shouta, and cocks his head. "Was it personal, Eraserhead?"

Shouta says, "I would assume plenty of people have personal issues with someone like Kai Chisaki."

"Hm. I suppose." He folds his hands on the table. "Let me be frank, Eraserhead. The Shie Hassaikai is an organization I've had my eye on for years. They've never been involved with any sort of trafficking or experimentation - not even in the pre-All Might days when crime was significantly easier to get away with. Then all of a sudden - " he snaps his fingers, and cocks his head to the opposite side. "You give the Shie Hassaikai leader 'information' - information that you're pointedly not providing details on, don't think I didn't notice that - and that leads him to finding out that there's something fishy in his organization that no one had known of. Not me, not any of the other groups keeping an eye on 'the last yakuza', and not Rei - not the actual boss who more or less raised Chisaki."

Shouta stares at him. "Rei - he *raised* Chisaki?"

"Took him in as a kid and brought him up as his own. Chisaki and

Alana were pretty much raised as siblings. Rei apparently doted on both of them equally. For him to turn on Chisaki… that's not a small thing, Eraserhead."

That would explain Rei and Alana's original hostility. He respects Rei for sticking to his morals even more than he did before. It takes a unique kind of strength to harm family when upholding principles and ideals - a strength that Shouta isn't sure he'd have if he was in a similar situation.

It's admirable in a certain light. It also makes Chisaki's future yakuza takeover weirdly heartbreaking and his abuse towards Eri even more rage-inducing than it already was.

"What Chisaki was doing with his quirk 'research' - if we can call it that, considering he wasn't exactly a scientist and the ones he hired were morons at best - is dangerous. And he couldn't have been only using Shie Hassaikai resources, or else Rei would've noticed a long time ago." Tsukauchi leans back in his seat and keeps his keen eyes on Shouta. "It implies that there's a benefactor behind his experiments. Someone who wanted to reverse-engineer Trigger for who-knows-what but didn't want to get their nose dirty."

"Is that what you think he was doing?" Shouta asks incredulously. "Why would he need so many alive human subjects for that? That can't be right."

Tsukauchi shrugs. "That's what his notes say. The ones on site at the warehouse, I mean."

"That's crap."

"Well, that's what's being documented when the case gets shut. if you would tell me what information you told Rei - that might be enough for me to start speculating on other reasons and look into them. Otherwise, the investigation will close and that's what they'll say." He shrugs again. "My hands are tied. There's nothing else for me to go on."

"Unless I throw you a bone," Shouta says, unamused.

"Got it in one."

Shouta retorts, "Why are you so invested in this? You said this was only brought to your attention because you saw Chisaki in the hospital, but you obviously have your own theories about what's

going on if you want to pursue this so badly."

"If Chisaki's benefactor is who I think it was, this is a matter of national security. I'm not at liberty to share any further information."

"It's personal," he argues. "You wouldn't have been as bothered by me blowing you off before if this was just a job."

Tsukauchi doesn't deny it. He says, "I can't tell you anymore."

They're at an impasse.

Tsukauchi has all but admitted that he's not here on any sort of official business. He has no authority to force Shouta to give information he won't give. He has nothing else to work with from here. He has no leverage either - whether he knows it or not, he confirmed that Shouta's rough treatment of Chisaki wasn't documented anywhere. (Sometimes shit police work is a godsend.) He clearly knew it was Shouta who beat him to a pulp thanks to his conversation with Overhaul, but the testimony of a known human trafficker, even if he hasn't been convicted yet, is worthless.

Shouta, though, knows how dangerous Chisaki became the first time around. If he was working under a "mysterious benefactor," then the threat that Shouta thought he had dealt with has only been delayed.

If the mysterious benefactor is All Might's archnemesis like Tsukauchi's reaction is implying (what else would cause his irritating persistence?), then this could spell trouble for Shouta. It's not like someone who can go toe-to-toe with All Might and nearly win is someone to be underestimated - and All for One isn't someone who ever seemed to lack for resources. Shigaraki surely didn't once he inherited everything from the man.

If Shouta doesn't give him something when Tsukauchi's already suspecting Sensei's involvement, he might drag the number one hero into this mess. All Might throwing his weight around opens more doors than Shouta even knows of.

He can't afford to be on All Might's radar just yet - not when he's trying to fix the future without any sort of brute force. If he can just find Shigaraki and deal with him quietly before his mentor passes on his abilities, then there won't be any need for All Might to step in until his final battle with the aforementioned mentor. He can have his glorious final battle and settle into retirement without having the threat of the League hanging overhead.

All Might as a symbol is something Shouta has little to no respect for - a peaceful retirement for All Might isn't something Shouta gives a damn about. *Toshinori Yagi* , though…

Yagi is a good man who deserves peace. If Shouta didn't need the man to deal with All for One, he would do his best to keep him out of the fight entirely. No one should have to fight with the chronic pain Yagi dealt with every day - no one should have to deal with those sorts of injuries in the first place, but the least Shouta can do is make sure Yagi isn't unnecessarily stressed before he needs to do his part, then let the man get some fucking *rest* for once.

He sighs. Rubs his neck and makes a decision that will, likely, cause problems later. "Look. I can't tell you where I got my information from. If you can accept that and not question it, I'll tell you what I know. Consider me an anonymous source reporting on an anonymous source."

Tsukauchi leans forward. "I'm all ears, Eraser."

It's a good thing that Tsukauchi has his quirk - a good bit of what Shouta decides to tell him isn't anything verifiable in this time.

At no point does Tsukauchi seem like he disbelieves what Shouta's saying - that Chisaki's experiments were never solely about Trigger, that he had heard from an anonymous source that the criminal underground had never been as "gone" as All Might would have the public believe, that there was someone behind the curtains pulling strings and planning a dangerous, long-term attack on the hero institution as a whole.

He talks and talks and talks - more than he expected he would, and more than he intended to share. But Tsukauchi doesn't ask him how he learned all of this, or where it came from, or if Shouta was planning on sharing any of this with anyone else - he listens and occasionally takes notes, but otherwise, he lets Shouta go.

He's about to trail off and let Tsukauchi make of his word vomit what he will, then he hesitates.

So much would be easier if he could find Shigaraki. If Tsukauchi has the connections he thinks he does, with All Might and whatever jobs he had before settling as a detective, then...

There's the sound of approaching footsteps, a familiar tread that makes the decision for him.

“There’s a guy,” he finally says. “With a quirk that disintegrates everything he touches. He’s dangerous. Unstable. And I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s somehow involved with the ‘mysterious benefactor’ you’re suspecting. If you happen to hear about him, I’d appreciate a heads up.”

Tsukauchi puts his pen down. He says, “You’re sure you don’t know anything about this benefactor?”

Shouta says, “No,” even as he knows damn well it’s a blatant lie that the man will pick up on.

Tsukauchi flinches. “Eraserhead, please - “

The door slams open at the perfect moment as if he and Hizashi had planned it. Blonde, still wearing his hero suit, and loud as ever, the man struts in without hesitation. He’s holding out his keys and jangling them pointedly, a dramatic pout pulling at his soft lips.

“Shoooouta~ You promised me you’d be ready at ten. It’s ten-oh-five! You know that means you have to stay five extra minutes now, right?”

who's acting weird? a) hizashi b) shouta c) nemuri or d) all of the above

Chapter Summary

Hizashi picks Shouta up from the station. They talk about Hisashi.

Chapter Notes

hello everyone i meant to update way earlier BUT like the mid-20's lesbian i am i made the impulsive decision to get a new kitten and she does Not Approve of me typing when i should be playing with her and giving her cuddles instead (she's the cutest thing EVER i really hope her and my current cat get along b/c my current cat is already the cutest ever and together they'd be SO CUTE god pray that they become the perfect cat siblings like i'm hoping for) (i'm thinking i'm going to name her bug but i'm lowkey considering toshi (u know like toshinori) even though that'd have everyone making fun of me for being a weeb but like. bnha has gotten me through the hell that is 2020 so part of me wants to pay tribute to that, ya feel me?)

ANYWAY enough about my personal life that isn't why you all are here~~~ you're here for shouta finally hanging out with his friends! doing normal 20's things! having a personality outside of co-parenting izuku and angsting about the potential future (not really but like he's sorta trying)!!!!

it's such a delight to have everyone chatting in the comments, both being nice to me and this fic and then ALSO chatting with each other <3 i hope you all keep having fun here~! thank you so much for reading and supporting this fic <3

Tsukauchi is displeased but not dissatisfied with his sudden departure. Armed with a mountain of intel to chew over, he gives Shouta his card, a pointed, “If you think of anything else, call me at any time,” and a small wave goodbye as Hizashi forcefully shoves Shouta out of the police station.

Hizashi’s already babbling about his day, asking why the station was so busy, asking what he was doing with a random detective, what did the guy need to know, why were you hiding in a conference room it took me forEVER to find you -

“It took you five minutes,” Shouta says, unimpressed.

“Yeah, like, forever!” he repeats with a faux-pout. “It’s rare that you actively request my company, you know. I want to make the most of it and five minutes lost is five minutes too many!”

“You’re ridiculous.”

Hizashi’s car is a sleek black - something fancy. Shouta isn’t the kind of man who gives a damn about cars, so he’d be guessing randomly if he tried to put a name to it. It’s a nice enough one but not ostentatious, which is in line with his civilian-self rather than his hero persona. It makes it weird to see him all decked out as Present Mic behind the wheel of something that’s so subdued in comparison.

He doesn’t remember if he’d ridden in it the first time around or not - probably not, since they weren’t on speaking terms at this point and Hizashi had more than enough money to buy a new car every few years.

Sliding into the passenger seat, he lets out a soft breath of relief. Whether that conversation with Tsukauchi went the way it should’ve and whether it’ll cause problems later - at the very least, it’s over with. One less stressor for him to worry about, and if he’s really lucky, Tsukauchi might hear something about Shigaraki and pass it on.

He won’t call it a win, but he won’t call it a loss just yet either.

“So - “ Hizashi drags out as he shoves the car into reverse, backing out of his parking spot. “What were you talking to that guy about? He’s not from the area, is he?”

“He’s a detective from out of town. Wanted some more information about a case I was on a month ago.”

“Is that case why you’ve been so weird lately?”

Shouta stares at him pointedly. “Like you haven’t been?”

“Whaddya mean? I’m better than ever,” he pouts.

“So it’s a perfectly normal thing for you to avoid visiting whenever Inko’s around? That isn’t weird at all?”

Hizashi winces. Normally, Shouta would be smug at getting the reaction he was hoping for. In this case, drained from a day of caring

for a feverish Izuku and Tsukauchi's questioning, Shouta can't stop himself from scowling.

After he doesn't say anything, Shouta huffs. "The case isn't why I've been 'weird'," he supplies with the appropriate air quotes. "Izuku's dad called on his birthday."

Present Mic, a hero whose rank lingers somewhere in the thirties, nearly slams on the brakes and kills both of them in the middle of the highway. Actions worthy of a hero, obviously. "WHAT?"

"The road, Mic - "

"HIS DAD'S STILL IN THE PICTURE?"

"The ROAD - "

"YOU'VE NEVER MENTIONED HIS DAD BEFORE - "

"HIZASHI YAMADA, WATCH THE *FUCKING ROAD*!"

Hizashi pointedly turns back to face forward like he wasn't about to drive them both into oncoming traffic. "Fine, yeesh, you don't have to yell... Can you blame me, though? I thought the guy was dead or something. Never heard anything about him from you or Izuku." He pauses, then hesitantly asks, "Are he and Inko - y'know. Like. Is it some sort of weird. I mean." He coughs and shakes his head. More firmly, he asks, "How are you feeling about that? Did you talk to him?"

"No. The guy's not around or anything like that. He only calls on holidays." His face twists against his will. "Well, he used to. Not sure if he's suddenly growing a parental bone or if he found out I was staying with them and felt threatened, but he bought Izuku a cell phone for his birthday to 'keep in touch' better."

"Ew."

"Yeah. Inko also thinks that he was involved in some shady crap, so that doesn't help either - "

"What?"

"So that's not someone I think Izuku should be talking to, but it's not really my place to say who Izuku can and can't talk to. Inko seems to think it's fine as long as she's there when they talk, but. I dunno."

“Sorry, we need to backtrack for a second - Izuku’s bio dad might be a criminal?” Hizashi glances at him out of the corner of his eye. “What kind of illegal are we talking? Serial killer, jaywalker…?”

“Mafia involvement is the vibe I was getting, but Inko doesn’t know for sure. He apparently spoiled her during her pregnancy to the point that Inko was uncomfortable with it.”

“That’s not that weird, is it? Isn’t that the baby daddy’s whole job? To spoil the pregnant lady? If he went a little overboard - ”

“‘Spoiled’ here means ‘he bought her a house and bribed her college professors,’ which I can’t imagine would be possible on an average villain’s budget. Get me?”

“Ah.”

“Yeah.”

They turn down a familiar road - one that means they’re only a few blocks from Hizashi’s condo.

“So you didn’t answer my question. How are you feeling about this?”

Shouta shrugs and turns so he’s looking out the window. “It’s not my business. It’s Izuku’s dad. If Inko’s okay with him being around, then I’ll deal with it.”

“Okay, yeah, obviously - but that doesn’t mean you can’t have emotions about it. It can’t feel good to have Inko’s mysterious crime-boss ex lurking around.”

“Obviously,” he parrots. He sighs and presses his forehead against the window, glad for the coolness against his brow. “It feels shitty. I feel shitty. I can’t protect them against someone who I don’t even have a full name for. Don’t know what the guy looks like, don’t know what he can do, don’t know what he’s involved in - Inko seemed terrified of the man until the call on Izuku’s birthday. Then he gives some half-assed placation that he doesn’t have any intention of bothering them and a shitty apology for how he treated her, and suddenly she’s perfectly fine with him talking to Izuku. He sounds dangerous to me, but.” He sighs again. “But he was kind when Izuku told him he was quirkless. And Izuku was so *happy* about that.”

The car comes to an abrupt stop. Shouta actually takes in his surroundings instead of staring blankly and sees that they’ve entered a

creepy looking parking garage. Presumably the one attached to Hizashi's condo, but it's not like creepy parking garages have many characteristics that differentiate them from each other.

Hizashi reaches over to throw an arm around Shouta's shoulders, squeezing him lightly. Shouta leans into it just a little.

"That sounds tough," Hizashi says carefully. "I don't know what I'd do if I was in your position. You're right that it's ultimately Inko's decision, but she obviously respects your opinion when it comes to raising Izuku. Have you actually explained this to her or just glowered whenever the man's name comes up?"

Shouta grumbles. "Shut up."

"Yeah. Thought so." He reaches up and pinches Shouta's cheek lightly, cooing at Shouta. "Your grumpy silence is adorable but a curse, Shouta. You gotta speak up if you're upset about something. Not many people have mindreading quirks, you know."

"It's not like I have any real say over what Inko and Izuku do. I'm just some guy they took in out of pity."

"Oh shut up," Hizashi groans loudly, smacking the cheek he had previously been affectionately pinching. "They obviously think of you as family - lil' 'Zuku-chan looks at you like you hung the moon, sun, and every single star in the sky by hand. I haven't really seen much of Inko - "

"It's almost like you're avoiding her or something weird like that - "

"But," he continues, ignoring Shouta completely. "She also clearly cares about you. And you obviously care about them very, very much. Unless she's a complete idiot, she won't think you're bringing this up out of misplaced jealousy or anything less than actual concern. And if you're concerned, she'll want to hear about it. You feel me?"

Shouta nods. Then he blinks and faces him. "What in the world would I be jealous about?"

"Absolutely nothing," Hizashi chirps cheerily. "Now - Nemuri probably already snuck in, so are we going to start this 'let's de-stress Eraserhead' party or keep moping out here?"

"If this get-together has any party-like elements, I'm leaving immediately."

“You’re such a stick-in-the-mud! After I went to all this trouble - “

“Trouble?”

“Picking you up, stocking up on lychee jelly - “

“You didn’t have to do that - “

“Threatening Nemuri with pain of death if she surpasses her baseline level of flamboyance, making cookies - “

“I’m leaving,” Shouta deadpans. He slides out of the car and starts walking towards the exit. “It was temporary insanity that made me think coming over here was a good idea. Dealing with a puking kid is better than this.”

“SHOUTAAAA - “ Hizashi wails as he jumps out and darts over to tackle him. Shouta barely misses chipping a tooth when they tumble down onto the concrete, and he might’ve just bruised his cheekbone with the fall. “YOU CAN’T LEAVE, I BAKED! FOR YOU!”

“I had to clean up neon green vomit multiple times today, and somehow that’s less annoying than you trying to break my eardrums over cookies.”

“Aw, was the little guy sick?”

Their heads shoot up immediately to see Nemuri standing with two bags on each arm, her helmet still on, and a faux-pout playing at her lips. Her bike - a red thing that makes more noise than should be allowed by any city ordinance - is propped against the wall adjacent to where Hizashi parked. She’s wearing pajamas underneath a leather jacket and doesn’t seem like she has any makeup on.

It’s a familiar sight. Nemuri rarely bothers putting effort into her outfits outside of work, after all. But it makes Shouta’s throat go a little tight when he realizes how long it’s been since he’s had a night like this with his friends. After they became teachers, they spent so much time together throughout the day that nights like this - just picking one of their places to relax at - became a rarity.

He presses his forehead against the ground, ignores the lump in his throat, and says, “So sick. There’s nothing in this world more pitiful than an eight-year-old dry heaving and shaking his head when you offer to turn on his favorite All Might cartoon.”

“It must’ve been terribly pitiful if you *willingly* offered to watch something with All Might,” Hizashi teases. “Should I return ‘Zuku’s favor and make him a get well soon card?”

“If you want to add a stroke onto his list of ailments, be my guest. A card from his second favorite hero will finish him off if this virus doesn’t.”

“Is that jealousy I detect?” Nemuri laughs. “Inko seems to think you have the permanent spot of little Izuku’s number one favorite, so that’s completely uncalled for.”

“See, Nemuri talks to Inko,” Shouta says pointedly, tilting just enough to catch Hizashi’s eye. “She’s nice. Why are you avoiding her?”

Hizashi says, “I’m not avoiding her!”

“And you - “ Shouta tilts his head in the other direction to look at Nemuri, who freezes. “Why are you avoiding me? This is the first time you’ve talked to me in weeks.”

Nemuri scoffs and hitches the grocery bags a little higher on her arms. “My life doesn’t revolve around you, Eraser.”

“You’re both morons,” he says blandly. “If you’re going to lie, at least do it better. Or make it entertaining to listen to. Blatant false denials are boring.”

They protest, but Shouta doesn’t bother to listen. He rolls out from underneath Hizashi and gets to his feet, stretching and working his jaw to make sure he didn’t jar it too badly in the fall. “Let’s go inside. I want jelly.”

They latch onto his subject change with clear relief.

“Do you ever eat anything else? Is eating only jelly how you keep your womanly figure～?”

“You still like lychee, right? That’s the one I got so I hope that’s still your favorite but if it isn’t you have to tell me - you know, actually use your voice and TALK, that thing you seem to hate doing even when it’s REALLY USEFUL - “

He loves these weirdos, but fuck, they’re annoying.

stone-faced fuckery

Chapter Summary

> Hizashi's apartment is warm, and hopefully it'll survive their sleepover.

Chapter Notes

> hey all!!! apologies for taking longer than usual to post - october's a rough month for me so the end of september was spent with me prepping myself for it. i'm feeling alright going in though, and i'm gonna survive this month like i've survived the ones before (ง□ᴗ□)ง
>
> this chapter was fun to write (of course it was, it has our three mid-20's dumbasses in it) and i hope the resolution of Most Misunderstandings is satisfactory <3 i know there was a bunch of "SHOUTA JUST SAY YOU AREN'T DATING INKO PLZ" vibes and i tried to put that to rest in the most satisfying way i could imagine~
>
> thank you for your support and for enjoying this fic~ i hope you all continue to enjoy!!!

Hizashi's condo is nice. It's varying shades of white, gray, and black, with the occasional accent of a bright color. In the future, he had his records hung up and the gold and platinum were extreme contrasts to the relative dullness of his furniture.

The walls are startlingly different to what Shouta remembers. Instead of random art pieces and knickknacks, his walls are covered in familiar construction paper and more photo frames than he's ever seen outside of a store. The photos vary - there's some that Shouta recognizes from their U.A. years, some of Izuku that he either took himself or received in texts from Shouta, and some are of events that Shouta doesn't recognize. Those ones are of Present Mic, posing with different groups of people and kids, and all of them always have bright smiles.

The construction paper, obviously, is thanks to Izuku. Every card and picture that Izuku drew for him - with the notable exception of the one that Shouta knows he keeps in his wallet, in front of his hero ID - is pinned and placed with care.

Like a train, it hits Shouta how much he's changed. How much of an effect he's had on the people closest to him, even if he didn't intend to do anything to them.

Hizashi never had photos up before. He never had cards hung up like this before. Hell, he never *baked* before as far as Shouta ever knew.

The entire condo smells like vanilla and chocolate and something indescribably warm. With that and both of his best friends in one place, he'd only have to convince Inko and Izuku to move here and he thinks he could stay forever with no complaints.

Hizashi plays the part of host, shooing Nemuri and Shouta over to the couch and taking Nemuri's bags and helmet from her. Nemuri calls out, "Hope you two don't mind udon for dinner - I had a craving."

Shouta curls up a corner of the couch and tries valiantly not to doze off. Nemuri kicks him the minute his head starts to loll, so he kicks her back. She kicks him harder.

By the time Hizashi gets back with the takeout and silverware, the two of them are wrestling.

Shouta's pulling her hair while she gnaws on his arm, she's bashing her first against his head like a really aggressive noogie, and Shouta's planting his foot in her gut. Hizashi sighs, loudly and fondly, then yells, "QUIT WRECKING MY LIVING ROOM, LOSERS!"

It startles them out of their fight. Shouta spits out some of his hair that got trapped in his mouth. Nemuri reluctantly spits Shouta's arm out and says, "We didn't break anything!"

"You broke my skull."

"Anything important," she amends.

"Ouch," Shouta says dryly.

"You can't break his skull! He needs that to tell us what's been stressing him out so much! A-K-A the whole reason we got the band back together in the first place!" Hizashi almost waves his hands in emphasis, then seems to remember that he's balancing too much food for that to be a safe decision. He carefully places everything onto the coffee table, hands each of them their utensils, then plops to the ground and starts shoveling food into his mouth without further ado.

“Mm, good point,” Nemuri says, grabbing her own takeout container. “So. What’s on your mind, Eraser? Anything good? Bad? Filthy~?”

“Gross,” he says immediately. “And it’s noth - “

“Inko’s baby daddy is lurking and he’s stressed about it,” Hizashi cuts in ruthlessly. “And Inko’s baby daddy is potentially a mob boss, so it’s bad on that level too.”

Nemuri’s jaw drops. “What? Is she okay?”

“We literally just talked about this, the answer is that I have to talk to Inko - end of story. End of stress. Do we really need to rehash it?” Shouta complains.

“I think we need to talk about you feeling threatened by Inko’s ex,” Hizashi says bluntly. “Feelings are important to acknowledge, Shouta.”

“Oi, time out!” Nemuri waves her arms into an ‘X’ formation and hisses. “Are we just going to brush past the fact that Inko, creator and owner of all things sweet and wonderful and absolutely perfect in every way, hooked up with a mob boss?”

“Potential mob boss,” Hizashi corrects her. “And honestly, I mean, who else would be able to crawl into a cold-hearted, work-obsessed mobster’s heart?”

“You’re really stretching what little you know and running a few miles with it,” Shouta drawls. “And I don’t think she crawled into his heart so much as she crawled into his bed.”

“Ooh, are we going to finally get the deets about - “

“I don’t wanna hear it!” Nemuri uncharacteristically yelps, slamming her hands over her ears. Some of the broth from her udon goes flying from her movement. “Inko is PURE and I don’t want to imagine her having sex with men who don’t deserve her!”

“The pure part is debatable, but otherwise: agreed.”

Hizashi pouts. “Fine fine fine. So are we going to talk about what you did to piss Inko off?”

He sighs. “It’s not a big deal. She was only pissed because I overreacted to a potential break-in last night and I guess I’ve been

overbearing - “

“Jesus Christ, are you going to continue to say extremely concerning things and then rush past them like nothing’s amiss?” Nemuri exclaims around a mouthful of noodles. “A ‘potential break-in’? The fuck does that mean?”

Shouta sighs again, louder this time. “Izuku’s window was unlocked when I went to check on him after my patrol last night. He also was cold when his room is always overheated, and he was lying weird.”

“So - “

“So I think someone opened Izuku’s window last night and potentially moved him in his sleep.” He makes a face and stabs at his udon viciously. “Inko thinks I’m being paranoid.”

“You are pretty paranoid,” Hizashi agrees. “Was anything taken?”

“No.”

“Did Izuku see anything?”

“Izuku woke up with a fever. He said he didn’t open the window, but then he said he might’ve when Inko asked him.”

His idiots exchange furtive glances. Shouta shovels noodles into his mouth while he waits for them to finish acting like he doesn’t see the looks they’re sharing.

Nemuri carefully says, “It’s more likely that a kid would open up a window and forget about it than someone would break in, change the kid’s sleeping position gently enough he wouldn’t wake up, not take anything, then leave.”

“You sound like Inko. I wouldn’t just imagine something like - “

“But!” she interrupts him quickly. “You’re a good hero with good instincts. You wouldn’t come to that conclusion with nothing to go on. I know you wouldn’t imagine hearing something, not somewhere where you normally feel safe. So maybe the truth is somewhere in the middle of the two?”

Shouta deflates. He hadn’t realized how high his shoulders were, how tense they were, until they relaxed at Nemuri’s words. “Yeah. Maybe.”

“Just talk to her,” Hizashi says encouragingly. He slings an arm over Shouta’s shoulders and bumps their hips together, grinning brightly. “Communication’s important for relationships! You don’t want to lose the love of your life over something stupid like this, ya feel me?”

Shouta gives him the most cutting unimpressed look he can manage. It’s been known to make students cry. “Har har. Very funny.”

“I’m not kidding!” he protests, squeezing him tighter. “Inko’s been good for you. You look like you actually get sleep nowadays. Which normally in new relationships is a bad sign, at least sexually, but in your case - “

“Seriously, knock it off,” Shouta says. “The joke wasn’t funny when Sansa made it and it isn’t funny now.”

“Joke?”

“Inko can do way better, and she’s not exactly my type.”

They both stare at him blankly. Nemuri sips at her iced tea until there’s only ice left, then sips some more, pointedly making obnoxious slurping noises.

Shouta stares back.

“You live with her,” Hizashi says slowly.

“Obviously.”

Nemuri points out, “You’re pretty much co-parenting her kid.”

“I’m not co-parenting - “

“Use whatever word you’re comfortable with - nannying, watching, guarding, whatever - you’re very much involved in Izuku’s life.”

Shouta shies away from that. He’s not ready to unpack what that means, what he is to Izuku when he doesn’t have any legitimate claim to the kid. “Sure, whatever.”

Nemuri puts her cup down and picks up her bowl to sip at the remaining broth. In between sips, she continues, “And you like Inko. But you’re not together?”

“Obviously not.”

Hizashi bursts out with, “Why the hell not?!” and frantically waving arms as punctuation to his incredulity.

“Are you kidding me?” He looks at both of them individually. Hizashi looks honestly befuddled, while Nemuri is still sipping at her bowl placidly. He looks between them, squints, and says, “You’re joking.”

“We’re really, really not.”

He squints harder. “Inko’s a woman.”

“Yes…?”

“What are you playing at? You both know damn well that I don’t go for women.”

Nemuri chokes on her soup and starts coughing. Hizashi’s eyes go wide.

Shouta stares at them, bewildered.

“Ex-fucking-cuse me?” Nemuri gasps out in between coughs. “Are you - the fuck? We damn well did NOT know that!”

“Of course you did,” Shouta argues. “I told you in high school that I was gay. This isn’t new information.”

Hizashi’s eyes are so wide that his sunglasses do nothing to hide his shock. Nemuri has broth dripping down her chin, eyes also wide.

“When the FUCK did you tell us that? Pretty sure we’d remember that!”

It’s a vivid memory for him considering he never bothered telling anyone else of his preferences the first time around. He says, “We were on the roof. You were trying to set me up with Yume, and I said she wasn’t my type. You asked what my type was if Yume wasn’t, and I said I’d rather date Hizashi.”

Hizashi’s throat makes a noise that isn’t human by any definition. It’s a guttural, throaty noise that can’t be good for his voice. His arm that’s around Shouta’s shoulders is spasming strangely, like he’s clenching and un-clenching a fist.

Nemuri reaches out, grabs Shouta’s face, and tugs him close. She hisses, “You stone-faced FUCKER, we thought that was a JOKE. I didn’t know that was a coming out speech!”

“It wasn’t exactly a speech - “

“And how the FUCK were we supposed to take that as ‘oh yeah, by the way guys, I’m gay,’ when you’re always being a sarcastic shit?!”

Shouta shrugs. “I thought it was clear. Sorry.”

Hizashi’s head drops to Shouta’s shoulder, shoves half of his fist into his mouth, and lets out a muffled scream. Nemuri squeezes Shouta’s face tightly enough that he winces.

“You’re a fucking idiot,” she says. “The stupidest, biggest, most idiotic IDIOT. This whole time - this WHOLE time - “

“Why is this such a big deal? So I’m not dating Inko.”

“It changes EVERYTHING!” she shrieks, finally releasing his face. “Literally everything!”

“Like what?” he asks.

“Like the fact that Inko is single!”

“What does that matter?”

Nemuri’s face goes blank suddenly. Like a door slamming shut, the fire and irritation bleeds out of her and leaves a curiously bland grin in place. She pointedly looks away and avoids eye contact while she fiddles with her empty takeout container. “I guess it doesn’t.”

“It obviously does.”

“It doesn’t - I mean, why would I care if Inko’s single or not?” she laughs weirdly. “That’s not my business. I should just be glad that she’s not dating a loser like you.”

Hizashi keeps screaming.

Nemuri’s face is twisted into some semblance of her normal carefree flamboyance but not quite hitting its mark. Her grin is sharp, her hands are tight on the garbage she’s picking up, and as she walks into Hizashi’s kitchen to throw it away, her steps would be better described as “vicious stomps.”

Hizashi’s scream has yet to abate. His lung capacity is, if nothing else, extremely admirable.

Shouta squints at the coffee table and urges his brain to make the connection that's tickling at the edge of his consciousness. He scratches at the stubble on his chin, thinks, and can almost feel the smoke coming out of his ears as his brain goes into overdrive.

When Nemuri takes her seat again, Shouta turns to face her. He asks, thoughtfully, "Do you want to date Inko, Nemuri?"

She sputters. Hizashi's scream cuts off.

"You'd be better than Sansa, but not by much," he muses, undeterred. "And you'd have to learn how to actually talk to Izuku. He's a kid, not a wild animal to placate and coo over. But I wouldn't hate it. Inko might - "

"I'm not gay," Nemuri says quickly. "That's not - no. I'm not. Me, dating Inko?" she laughs a little too loud. "Can you imagine it? She's way too - And I'm too - no. It wouldn't even make sense! You're ridiculous."

It does make sense, though. He can't put his finger on why, exactly. He thinks that Nemuri needs someone that isn't easily intimidated but also isn't too threatening themselves. Inko - gentle with a steel spine - would be perfect for her.

Nemuri would be good for Inko as well. Inko needs someone who will make her have fun and get her out of her head. Nemuri's confidence is something that Inko and Izuku could learn from, too.

He doesn't push. "Alright, sorry. If you want to talk about it - "

"Shut up. I'm not gay. I've fucked so many guys, okay?"

"Hey, bisexuality is a thing," Hizashi says hoarsely. Clearly his scream-fest caused some damage. He rubs at his throat, clears it lightly, then continues, "You can fuck guys and girls and anyone else. I certainly do."

"Good for you," she retorts. "How about you go fuck yourself too?"

Hizashi mutters, "Touchy…" and Shouta snorts.

This, clearly, was the incorrect way to respond to Nemuri's statement. With a screechy war cry, she leaps at both of them and tackles them to the ground. Because Nemuri's mean, she goes straight for their hair and starts tugging with ruthless cruelty.

Retaliation should be expected. The living room may have survived Nemuri and Shouta, but Hizashi's always been the most destructive between the three of them.

warmth

Chapter Summary

A pre-dawn conversation between Shouta and Hizashi.

Chapter Notes

first off: to everyone who actually reads these authors' notes, you all deserve the world. i tend to just babble in here for a bit and sometimes feel silly including them, but it's really sweet when you guys mention something from me being a dork up here. so thank you for that <3

second off: i am **so** glad that you all seemed to appreciate the "wait you're NOT dating?!" scene so much because i had SO MUCH FUN WRITING THAT. you have no idea how much it was killing me waiting to post that last chapter, because i had written out that interaction ages ago and was VIBRATING with the need to share it with you all. i'm delighted that it was well-received, so thank you for that as well <3

and finally: just thank you all in general. i know i have a sappy thank you in literally every chapter, but i really mean it. i hadn't expected this fic to have so many dedicated readers and i feel really lucky to have so many kind and supportive people who read my work and then take the time to let me know about it. it means a lot and makes writing (which is already something i enjoy doing) even more fun and meaningful <3

so now that i'm done with being all sappy and crap, onto the show! i hope the erasermic shippers enjoy~

They wrestle, they tease each other, they eat a bunch of junk food, and eventually, they fall asleep pretty much on top of each other on Hizashi's stiff and barely-used couch. His coffee table, casualty of their battle, has lost a leg and looks more like a ramp than anything else.

None of them are heavy sleepers, but Shouta's the lightest of them all. He startles awake sometime before the sun's risen, blinking crust out of his eyes. His limbs are pinned down - Nemuri on one side, her legs over his lap and thighs crushing his right arm at an uncomfortable angle. He can't see her head from the angle he's currently at, just the underside of her neck as it tilts backwards off the arm of the couch.

He carefully turns his head to the opposite side, because if she's not breathing on his ear then a certain blonde menace must be.

Hizashi is draped over Shouta like a heavy blanket, one arm wrapped around Shouta's waist and the other tucked up near his face. Shouta's shoulder must be a decent enough pillow since Hizashi's conked out there, nose tucked under his ear and likely what caused his abrupt awakening. He had left Shouta and Nemuri alone long enough to change out of his costume and comb out most of the gel keeping his hair from succumbing to gravity, but that means there are crusty chunks of hair covering his eyes. The rest is pulled back in a messy ponytail that is a definition of "rat's nest" if there'd ever been one.

Shouta feels warm. For the first time in months, his mind feels blissfully and utterly calm.

He counts a couple dozen of Hizashi's slow breaths, relishing the pre-dawn quiet. He's going to have a crick in his neck later and his back already aches from sleeping hunched over like this, but his blonde idiot's peaceful face is a nice enough view to keep him from attempting to alleviate that discomfort.

Maybe it's because problems feel far away when the world is this quiet - maybe he really did just need a night of goofing off with his friends - but either way, he feels significantly less pessimistic about the many problems he has to sort out. Less overwhelmed, less terrified, less panicked - it's a startling change. If this is how much better he feels after takeout and some lazy conversation, he wonders how he'd feel if he could tell someone about the decades of knowledge he's burdened with.

For the first time since coming back, Shouta considers the problems at hand without feeling like his heart would explode out of his chest from stress.

- Hisashi is a problem. He can't really do anything about him right now. He'll keep his ear to the ground for information about him, make sure Izuku doesn't have too many conversations with him alone, and ask Inko for more details about his personality and quirk so he can come up with concrete plans on how to keep the Midoriyas safe from him. He hadn't wanted to push her unnecessarily when Hisashi is clearly a sensitive topic, but he knows he can approach it somewhat-tactfully enough that she won't be upset.
- Shigaraki is a problem. All for One is also a problem. Shouta

can't do anything with them either until he finds out where they are or what they're doing. He's doing all he can with his investigations into both of them and their pasts. Worst case scenario, he doesn't find anything and he deals with them down the line when they eventually attack the USJ again. Not ideal, but it's manageable since he knows it's coming.

- Tsukauchi's prying is a problem, albeit less of a problem than Shouta originally feared. If Tsukauchi hears something about Shigaraki - great. Maybe he'll ask him to look into Hisashi as well, and if it won't risk Tsukauchi shoving him into a psych ward, he'll give him some more hints about what's-to-come in exchange.
- The Shie Hassaikai isn't a problem at the moment, but Shouta will check up on them periodically to ensure Eri's safety.
- Izuku is, as always, his problem child. His friendship with Bakugou isn't something he can affect right now, and there's only so much he can do for his self-esteem without being a professional. He'll just have to make sure Izuku knows he deserves better and that Shouta will always be there for him to talk to as needed. Similarly, his training is something to keep an eye on, but until he manifests his quirk there's only so much Shouta can do on that front. Deku never mentioned when his quirk appeared, which is information that Shouta didn't know would've been helpful to have, so it could happen at pretty much any point. There are worse waiting games, though, and Shouta can teach him fighting techniques and hone that crazy-intelligent mind of his in the meantime. He'll ensure that Izuku will be a formidable opponent by the time he starts high school.
- Overhaul isn't a problem, but Shouta's reaction to him is. The photos that Tsukauchi showed him of Chisaki in the hospital - that was bad. Shouta had known he had gone overboard, but he hadn't realized to what extent he had lost control. In some ways, Shigaraki's world was a lot easier since it was impossible to be too rough with nomus. He'll need to keep an eye on himself and take a step back if there's any indication that he'll operate on autopilot and feelings during an encounter rather than rationality.
- The potential intruder is a problem, but Shouta's reaction to the situation is a bigger one. Inko would be well within her rights to kick his ass to the curb for smothering them with his overprotectiveness. He'll have to work on his paranoia without dulling the edge his instincts give him in battle. His plans to implement a rudimentary security system will, hopefully, soothe

the more jagged edges of his stress and make this an easier endeavor.
- Nemuri doesn't seem like she's inclined to avoid him anymore, which means that's not a problem any longer. Her potential crush on Inko - not a problem, per se, but something to think on. Her discontent with her hero persona and the implied harassment she experiences - a problem but not one Shouta knows how to tackle. He'll have to talk to Hizashi, who is smarter and, despite his obnoxiousness, more tactful than him.
- Hizashi's avoidance of Inko is a minor problem that doesn't seem like it'll be difficult to remedy. He'll drag the idiot over for dinner with her whether he's willing or kicking and screaming.

It's a lengthy list, but it feels significantly more manageable than it did even a few hours ago.

Shouta suspects he needed some restful sleep to get his head on straight, but a fanciful part of him thinks it's due to the warmth of his friends surrounding him and the knowledge that he's not as alone as he always fears he is. They may not be able to directly help with his situation, but he knows if he asked them to jump, they'd give him some shit before saying, "Alright, fine, where? How high?"

He can't stop himself from yawning, which causes Hizashi's nose to wrinkle. He blinks awake almost immediately, and Shouta belatedly realizes how close he had gotten, busy staring at his friend's face and tracing the places where he knows wrinkles will show up someday.

Hizashi blinks a few times before a strange, dopey grin grows on his lips. He whispers, "Mornin'. Enjoying the view?"

Shouta murmurs, "I'd gag if it wouldn't wake Nemuri up. It's too early to deal with her."

"So mean," he says, but the grin widens. "What're you thinking about so early? Looks like you've been awake for a bit."

Hizashi's breath is warm. Shouta's warmer.

"Are you ever afraid of how much people rely on us?" The quiet question leaves him before he realizes he was planning on asking it. Before he realizes how much his burdens have been weighing on him, and how much he wants Hizashi to ground him.

Hizashi's smile softens into a pensive look. "You mean us specifically or heroes as a whole?"

“Both. Either.”

He hums softly. “Heroes as a whole - definitely. It’s terrifying how plenty of people won’t stand up and help just because they would rather a hero take care of it. It puts a lot of pressure on a category of people who already tend to have egos the size of mountains the minute they get any amount of screentime. If something goes wrong, it’s not the perpetrator’s fault anymore. It’s not the bystanders for standing around and allowing it to happen. It’s the heroes’ for not being there. We’re revered but held to a standard that only All Might can meet, and that’s not sustainable.

“Us specifically, though?” he hums again. “I dunno. Not really? We’re not All Might, but I feel capable. And I *know* you are. I don’t think there’s better hands than yours to entrust someone’s safety to.”

Shouta’s mouth is dry. “You’re too eloquent for how early it is.”

“Are you blushing?” Hizashi asks delightedly. He sits up so he’s not tilting his neck awkwardly anymore, looking at Shouta head-on and poking at his face gleefully. “Never thought I’d see the day - and all I had to say is something we both know is true, damn.”

His heart pounds in his chest, painfully loud in his ears. “How can you say that so confidently? So - like it’s a done deal. Like I’m not a mess who was living on the streets because I was too stubborn to sign with an agency. Like I’m not grumpy and self-destructive and rude and the worst pick - “

“Hey, hey,” he says gently, turning his poking and prodding fingers into a soft caress. He strokes over Shouta’s jaw, thumb catching against the stubble there. “Where’s this coming from? You’re incredibly capable and you’re great at what you do. You’ve gotta know that I’d trust you with just about anything.”

“Why?” His voice is rough, from sleep and emotion and pain. “I can’t do anything that anyone else couldn’t. There’s plenty of people smarter and more talented and with stronger quirks who can do so much more.”

“And most of them don’t care half as much as you do.”

Shouta’s breath hitches.

Hizashi, eyes knowing and kind, says, “You have so much heart, Shouta. If I had to entrust anything to anyone, you’d be my first

choice because underneath your grumpiness you care *so damn much* . I'd trust that over brute strength any day. That kind of caring is what a hero should act on, not because of fame or money or what most of us work for."

"Hizashi - "

"We use that word so lightly these days," he continues, releasing his hold on Shouta's face. "It used to mean someone who did something exceptional and saved people regardless of the personal cost, but anyone with a license is a hero now. Most pros don't do anything more than the bare minimum to look good and rise through the ranks. Hell, I don't consider myself a hero most days. I'm a pro, but a hero? Feels like a bit of a stretch to me."

"Of course you are - "

"I couldn't even save myself, Shouta," he cuts him off, tone unforgiving but softened by the quiet atmosphere. "I endangered countless civilians because I got sucked into the fame and glory parts of being in the spotlight. I didn't want to face my own problems so I drowned myself in booze and parties and I thought I was okay because I was a hero. I wasn't."

Shouta reaches over and takes Hizashi's hand, because he doesn't know what to say. Hizashi grasps it like it's a lifeline, squeezing tightly.

For a moment, the silence between them stretches.

Then, Hizashi's face falls back into that dopey grin. "You saved me, Shouta. So, yeah, I'm a bit biased, but I think you're a pretty damn good hero. I'm not afraid that people rely on you because I know firsthand that you're the best person to rely on."

Shouta scrubs at his eyes. "You're the one who did all the work. I just made you buy me coffee."

"Yeah," he says, smile unflinching. "I'd buy you coffee for the rest of our lives, you know. Even though your taste is absolutely atrocious - three pumps of caramel and two of vanilla in a *mocha* ? You're disgusting."

"Shut up. *You're* disgusting," he retorts automatically.

"And *you're* BLUSHING AGAIN, I love it!"

Shouta has to smack Hizashi's hand away when he goes to pinch his cheeks. "I'm not."

"YOU ARE AND IT'S ADORABLE!"

"For fuck's sake," is groaned from the other side of the couch. Nemuri slowly sits up, wincing and rubbing her neck. "You couldn't wait to start this song and dance until the sun came up? Really?"

"The sun's almost up," Shouta notes, peering out the window. "Want to pick up breakfast and take it to Inko's? She was probably up all night with Izuku."

Surprisingly, Hizashi's the one who jumps up and excitedly says, "Yes! Let's do that! We should pick up something nice for the kiddo too, cheer him up, you know? Hopefully he's feeling better. What does Inko like? She seems like a sweet breakfast kind of person, maybe we can pick up crepes or some fruit and pancakes or - "

pancakes, a dirty kitchen, and a teeny tiny secret

Chapter Summary

Izuku fesses up.

Chapter Notes

i live!!! lol sorry for the delay on this chapter - my writing process for this fic is that i try to stay 3-4 chapters ahead of what i post so i have time to edit if something i write in the future means i need to change some earlier details, and that's sorta what happened recently so i had to rewrite a ton...

hopefully it's sort of worth it! we're approaching like. Actual Plot finally. (wow, only took ~70,000 words to sort of get there...)

thank you thank you thank you all so much for the kind comments, the kudos, the bookmarks, and even the people who are just reading <3 the comments from last chapter really helped me keep a positive attitude even when this time of year gets me down, and i appreciate that more than you guys'll ever know <3 i really hope you all continue to enjoy this fic!

Inko looks exhausted when she opens the door, but she brightens and beams at them almost immediately. “Isn’t this a nice surprise? What made you all decide to accompany our paranoid grump home?”

Shouta says, “I’ll eat your share of pancakes. Don’t think I won’t.”

“He looks less stressed,” she notes, ignoring him easily. In the next moment, she reaches out to pinch his cheek affectionately. Shouta bats at her hand until she lets go. “All in all, I’ll give you two a B-plus for getting him out of his head.”

“A B?” Nemuri asks, feigning chest pain. “Inko, babe, you’re breaking my heart.”

She somehow gives Nemuri an even brighter smile, reaching out to nudge her shoulder playfully. “B- *plus* , Nemmy. I’d give you an A if you weren’t showing up at seven in the morning on a Saturday.”

Nemuri nudges her back - gently, like she’s avoiding bumping into a

glass case of porcelain figures. Considering how abrasive she normally is, it's odd to see her treat someone with so much care. "Like you weren't awake already. A little birdie told us that your itty-bitty one caught a bug, so I imagine you didn't sleep much."

The bags under Inko's eyes give credence to that assumption.

"How is our little listener?" Hizashi asks, doing a poor job of hiding his worry. He's always been the pack mule in the group, so he's laden down with their bags of breakfast food and feel-better treats for Izuku. Shouta had tried to insist that Izuku having the flu doesn't require gifts, and Hizashi and Nemuri had both stuck their tongues out at him and shoved more crap into their cart at the store. "Is he feeling any better? We got pancakes, but if he's not up for that, we brought oatmeal too and some Gatorade. Shouta said he likes red flavor best so we stocked up on that."

"You're too sweet," Inko coos, stepping away from Nemuri and back into the apartment. "Get in here. I'll get some tea going, and we can wait for Izuku to wake up. He was less nauseous last night, but I'm not sure if he's up for pancakes just yet."

The first thing Shouta notices when they walk in is the mess in the kitchen, which makes it clear that the Midoriyas didn't have an easy night. There's a broken bowl in the sink with a bunch of other dirty dishes and rags, the counters are sticky with what might be spilled juice, and there's something crusty on the floor that is likely dried bile or soup.

Shouta darts over to grab silverware and some napkins, then hands them to Nemuri. He rolls up his sleeves, waves at Hizashi and Nemuri to set up their takeout in the dining area, and pointedly looks in Inko's direction when she's distracted with closing the door.

Nemuri is smart enough to pick up on his less-than-subtle hint and drag Inko over with her and Hizashi, babbling about their antics last night. She's clearly badmouthing Shouta, going off of the way they're all laughing, but if it keeps Inko away long enough for him to clean up some of the mess that she was too exhausted to deal with, then he'll take the mockery without complaint.

The broken bowl isn't one that has any sort of sentimental value, so he tosses it into a bag and places it next to the garbage to dispose of properly later. He wipes the counters down quickly. The dishes can mostly wait, but the rags he tosses into the washing machine while

trying not to gag at their rancid smell. They were obviously used for cleaning up whatever fluids were being expelled by the problem child, and if he wasn't already certain that the night before had been a rough one, the smell would've been enough proof to convince him.

The crusty - whatever - that's on the ground is harder to scrub away. A paper towel and some soap doesn't do the trick, so he pulls out the heavy duty cleaner and a brillo pad they use for tough messes.

All-in-all, it doesn't take him more than ten minutes to get everything sorted out. He's just putting the cleaning supplies away when familiar tiny footsteps head towards his direction.

He straightens up, starts to say, "Hey kid - " and is cut off by a small torpedo to his gut. His breath whooshes out as Izuku does his damnedest to strangle him to death when he can only reach Shouta's waist.

Izuku buries his face in Shouta's stomach and grips him tightly. His scarf is half-wrapped around his neck and half-trailing on the ground behind him. He's also in different pajamas than he was wearing when Shouta left last night. For a moment, he hugs Shouta as tightly as his tiny body will let him, and Shouta pats at his curls gently.

Then he pulls back and gives Shouta the brightest, happiest smile he has in his repertoire. "You came back!"

Shouta blinks. "I live here."

"Yeah but! You came back!"

"Did you think that I wouldn't?" he asks, bewildered. "I just went to see Hizashi and Nemuri. I was always coming back."

"I threw up on you and cried a lot and being sick is really really gross so I wasn't sure and - "

He cuts him off. "'Zuku, you always cry a lot. And I'm a hero - we see plenty of puke and blood and guts. That's not nearly enough to get me to randomly move out."

"Yeah, but. It's gross."

"It's not that bad. Would you kick me out just because I was crying and puking?"

Izuku gives him an absolutely scandalized look. “Of course not, Mr. ‘Zawa!”

“So why would I leave just because you were?”

“Kacchan says that only babies cry so I’ve been trying to stop because I’m not a baby, I’m eight, and I don’t want you to think I’m a baby and I don’t want Kacchan to think I’m a baby, and Dad said - “ he stops. His eyes widen, and he looks like he’s one breath away from slapping his hands over his mouth to stop it from saying anything else.

Shouta’s eyes narrow against his will. “Your dad said…?”

Izuku ducks his head and looks at the ground. “Nothing.”

“I’m not mad at you. What did your dad say?”

“Nothing!”

“Don’t lie. I promise I won’t be mad.”

Izuku buries his face in Shouta’s stomach again and mutters something unintelligible. It sounds like, “S’posed to be a secret.”

Shouta doesn’t like that. An adult asking a kid to keep a secret is the largest red flag there is, and he can’t count the number of times that, “It was a secret, they told me not to say anything,” has popped up in children’s testimonies during his time as a hero.

His hand spasms with the urge to clench it into a fist, and only Izuku’s tiny, precious head being under his grip keeps him from doing so. For a moment, he breathes deeply and tries to make his brain think past the instinctive fear Izuku’s words sparked.

When he’s certain he can talk without screaming, he slowly says, “If someone tells you to keep a secret, you should only keep it if it’s protecting someone or if it’s really important.”

“Like how you and Mama asked me to keep you being an underground hero a secret, ‘cause since you’re underground it could hurt you if people knew that you were a hero,” Izuku says faithfully.

“Correct. Now - I understand that it’s your dad we’re talking about. I won’t make you tell me if you promised him you wouldn’t, if you feel that it’s important. But is what he asked you to keep secret - is it meant to keep you safe?”

Izuku hesitates. Then he shakes his head.

“Is it keeping him safe?”

He shakes his head again.

“Is it really that important?”

Another head shake.

“Are you afraid you’re going to get in trouble if you tell me?”

This time - a slow nod.

Shouta sighs. Pries him off of his stomach, crouches down, and looks him in the eyes. Izuku’s biting his lip and getting tenser with every second that passes.

“Look - I can’t guarantee you won’t be in trouble, because I don’t know what this secret is or why you’re keeping it. But your mom wouldn’t punish you for any reason other than she wants to make sure you grow up to be a good person or for your own safety. Got me?”

Izuku nods fervently.

“So. Wanna fess up?”

Because he’s a kid, it takes him a minute to muster up his courage. As a credit to Inko’s parenting, he, thankfully, doesn’t fear punishment more than he fears disappointing Inko or Shouta himself.

So, while it’s clearly difficult for him, Izuku takes a deep breath, shuffles his feet, and squeezes his eyes shut. In a rush, he says, “Dad knows that someone’s living with us but I didn’t tell him so I don’t know how he knows but I don’t think he knows it’s you, but he said that I shouldn’t get too attached to any of Mama’s boyfriends ‘cause who knows if they’ll stick around and he doesn’t want me to get hurt and I said you weren’t her boyfriend and he didn’t believe me so I said that you said that you’d only marry a guy so obviously you wouldn’t date Mama, and he asked why you stayed with us if you weren’t dating her, and I didn’t say anything ‘cause that would tell him that you were a hero and I know I wasn’t supposed to tell him that, and he said that he’d still ‘warn me against getting too attached, because no one is obligated to stay with you unless they’re family’ and I tried to say that you were family ‘cause that’s what Mama says but he was still weird about it and I got afraid so I didn’t wanna annoy you or

anything in case Dad was right but then I got sick and I threw up ON you and that's *super* annoying and it's gross too s-so I was afraid you left FOREVER a-and - "

How this kid doesn't pass out when he talks so fast is a mystery for another day.

Today, though, Shouta needs to find Hisashi Midoriya and *kick his ass* .

"Take a breath, 'Zuku," he says quietly. As Izuku gasps for breath, he cards a hand through his fluffy curls and takes a calming breath of his own. "Thank you for telling me. Did your dad say all of that during your monthly call?"

He obviously didn't. Inko listens to those calls, and she would've soothed Izuku's worries if she had known Hisashi said something even remotely along those lines.

Izuku ducks his head again. He mumbles, "Um. Sometimes Dad calls me at school."

A few things align in his head. The feeling of a secret being kept wasn't in regards to something about his friendship with Bakugou, or Bakugou treating him poorly - it's been about Hisashi.

Hisashi, who is likely a criminal.

Hisashi, who is viciously anti-pro-heroes and has tried to impose those views on Izuku.

Hisashi, who thinks he has any right to criticize who is or isn't in Izuku's life when he's barely a father in name, let alone in practice.

"Sometimes?"

Izuku's shoulders hunch up near his ears. "On Wednesdays and Fridays."

Hisashi, who clearly isn't respecting the boundaries that Inko set or even giving them a second thought.

Shouta clamps down on his anger, tucking it close to his chest. He calmly pats Izuku's head and says, "Thank you for telling me. Has your father said anything else that he told you to keep secret?"

Izuku says, "He said that if anyone at school was bothering me that I

just had to tell him and he'd take care of it as long as I didn't tell anyone."

Add another tally to the, "Hisashi is likely a mob boss" column. Shouta asks, "Did you tell him about any of your classmates?"

"No, I don't want anyone to get in trouble and plus if they do get in trouble they'll just get more mad at me."

It's probably a good thing that the bullies at his school will never know how close they came to being on a criminal's hit list. If any child other than Izuku had been made that offer, Shouta wouldn't blame them for taking advantage of it.

"You're a good kid, 'Zuku," Shouta says as he gets back to his feet, wincing at the pops and creaks that his knees emit. "I'm going to talk to Inko about this."

"Do you think she's gonna be mad?"

"Not at you. Your dad knows that the rules she set were for a reason, and he blatantly ignored them. That's not acceptable."

Izuku reaches up for Shouta's hand, which he gives to him readily. He swings it between them and doesn't look at Shouta as he says, "He said that he just wanted to know me better. He said he likes talking to me and that I'm really smart for my age and he thinks that I have interesting ideas and things to say."

Shouta blandly retorts, "I like talking to you and think you're smart and have good ideas, but you don't see me disobeying the rules that Inko lays out to tell you that."

Instead of the giggle Shouta was expecting, Izuku gives him an awed, adoring stare and the hold on Shouta's hand turns into a death grip.

"What?"

"You like talking to me? And think I'm smart?"

"I just said that."

Izuku squeezes his hand tighter and says, no louder than a whisper, "*Wow* ."

Shouta rolls his eyes heavenward for strength, even as his heart spasms painfully in his chest and his blood is still running hot at the

thought of Hisashi. “You’re ridiculous.”

“Mr. ‘Zawa, you’re so nice and cool and - “

“I’m really not.” Izuku’s face doesn’t change, indicating that his opinion and faith are completely unwavering. Shouta sighs and wonders how All Might put up with Deku’s staunch adoration for so long. “We’ll talk to your mom after we have breakfast. Hizashi and Nemuri brought pancakes. Go give them some hero worship instead.”

Izuku gasps in delight. “Mr. ‘Zashi’s here?!” And, proving that children’s attention spans are worse than a puppy’s, darts off to the living room to enthusiastically greet their guests.

Shouta takes a moment to feel his rage (how dare Hisashi attempt to destabilize Izuku’s fragile trust in him? How dare he?) and his fear (how can he protect them against someone who he can’t even find proof of existing?) before shoving it down. He focuses on his gratitude that Izuku was honest with him, the warmth of having all of his loved ones being under one roof for a meal, and the soft affection he feels for the Midoriyas and their willingness to welcome him into their unit.

Then, he goes to steal Hizashi’s strawberry pancakes since he knows that cretin didn’t save any for him.

a lead

Chapter Summary

Shouta catches a break.

Chapter Notes

every time i post a chapter i'm like "surely this will be the time no commenters make me cry with how nice they are, surely i have strengthened my heart enough that i won't have to lie down and take a minute to recover," and every time i'm incredibly wrong. you're all very kind and i really cannot express how grateful i am for your support and touching words mean to me.

now that being said: to everyone who said they stayed up late to read this - that is literally so sweet but PLEASE make sure you're getting enough sleep i swear the fic will still be there when you wake up!!!! do it for aizawa who would do many-a-questionable act in order to take a nap!!!!!!

this chapter's a bit of a filler one, but i hope you all enjoy anyway~ thanks for reading!

The conversation with Izuku about Hisashi went as follows:

“Izuku, you know that your father wasn’t allowed to talk to you outside of your monthly calls. I’m confiscating your phone.”

“Okay Mama.”

“I’ll be speaking to him about what he was saying about Shouta. I promise that if for any reason Shouta expresses any desire whatsoever to not live with us anymore that we’ll have a family discussion about it. He won’t just leave without saying anything. Right, Shouta?”

“Obviously.”

“If you’re ever uncertain or feeling afraid, I want you to talk to one of us about it. Okay?”

“Okay Mama.”

“This whole time - for weeks - we thought you were coming home upset because of Katsuki or the kids at school. It’s not because of them

though, is it?"

"Not always."

"What does Hisashi say to you that upsets you so much?"

Izuku was tight-lipped on that matter. He said that his father clearly didn't think highly of Shouta living with them, even if he doesn't know who Shouta is exactly. He said that Hisashi often would bring up how unfair Izuku's situation is and ask what, specifically, people at school say to him or do to him.

At long length, after they pried and pried and pried, he finally admitted that what upsets him the most is when Hisashi asks him what kind of quirk he would want if he could have one.

"I don't like being quirkless and useless," Izuku had said quietly, looking at his hands instead of him. "But it makes me sad to think about what I don't have. But I don't want to upset him and he always listens to me talk about what I want to talk about and I do like talking about quirks with him 'cause he knows a lot, but. I'm quirkless."

Inko gave him a big hug. She said, "I'm going to talk to him. If he wants to stay in your life, he's going to stop talking to you about things that upset you. Okay?"

"Okay Mama."

Shouta was too busy keeping his hands from trembling in rage to provide much support, but he pet Izuku's head and said, "Let's work on your flexibility today. Go jog a warmup lap around the building and I'll grab our mats. Don't push too hard since you're still recovering from being sick."

As Izuku went to do that, they were left alone for a few minutes. Shouta asked, "How is the search for a counselor going?"

"Terribly," Inko said listlessly. Her arms were crossed against her chest, and her eyes were dull. "No one wants to take on a quirkless client. Not when they know the suicide rate just as well as we do. Not when it'd be their reputation at stake if he killed himself during their care."

"What are you thinking?"

"What are YOU thinking?"

He said honestly, “I think that if I saw Hisashi right now, I’d shove his phone so far up his ass that he’d have to learn how to dial with his tonsils to contact Izuku again.”

“Graphic.”

Remembering Hizashi’s advice, he took a deep breath and said, “I don’t think he should be allowed in Izuku’s life. Not when he’s such an unknown. It’s dangerous, Inko.”

Inko had sighed. Helplessly tired, she shrugged. “I know. But it’s his father. Maybe this is all a misunderstanding. Maybe we’ll talk to him about his behavior and he’ll change. I’d like to give him a chance, at least.”

Shouta bit back his frustration. He bit back the instinctive, *“You gave him a chance and he blew it by riling up all of Izuku’s insecurities.”*

He instead said, “Okay. So what are we going to do about him, then?”

“What are we going to do about him?” Inko echoed tiredly.

The question that neither of them had an answer for. And, weeks later, Shouta still doesn’t have one.

Inko has called Hisashi a few times and received no response - not even the option to leave a voicemail. She’s kept Izuku’s cell phone locked up until Hisashi calls her back, and otherwise is unbothered by the situation. She seems content to wait the man out and stay in limbo, whereas Shouta is very much not.

He’s had to remind himself frequently that Hisashi is Inko’s ex and Izuku’s father - they make the decisions about the man. Not him. He doesn’t have that right.

What he has, though, is a voicemail from Sansa that might be a lead on the man.

“So after way too many night shifts and Otsuka begging for money to hire some professional IT folks - yes I have it recorded, he was literally begging the mayor and it was absolutely hilarious, but anyway - we finally have all of our backups implemented and our file system is back to normal. And since I know you were looking for that Hisashi guy, I wanted to let you know that one of our backup drives had a solid terabyte of old files that we’re going to search through to see if we actually need them or not. Must not have been synced up with our

current drives or something, I dunno. This stuff is way over my head.

“Figured you might want to check them out and see if your guy’s there. We won’t start deleting unneeded crap again until next week since we all need a break from technology and Otsuka wants to make sure we won’t get in trouble for getting rid of it - audit requirements and shit, I don’t get it.

“But, anyway - so you have until then to sort through it all. Also I noticed that you still haven’t gotten me Inko’s number, so if you’d like to get a move on - “

Shouta stops listening at that point. Half because he doesn’t care about Sansa’s problems, half because a text from Hizashi distracted him, and completely because he’s trying not to get his hopes up.

In theory, files that would have been deleted off of the main servers are normally files about people who can no longer be tried due to death or too much time passing, or minor infractions that no one gave a damn about. There are government regulations in place about data custodianship and ensuring that nothing gets deleted that could possibly affect future arrests or judicial proceedings.

In practice, it costs money to have space for all of that data. It’s quicker and cheaper to get rid of some old files than it is to buy a new server or purchase a higher tier of cloud storage. And, in practice, cops are corrupt and would absolutely delete anything that could make them look bad.

If information about Hisashi was on the backup, it either means he wasn’t a threat the police thought worth pursuing or he has connections in the force that would protect his anonymity.

With his limited knowledge about the man, Shouta would put money on the latter. Which means his window of opportunity is decreasing with every minute he waits.

He’s currently pinned by Eraserbit, having listened to the call while they were in the middle of yet another rousing round of heroes and villains. He says, “Izuku, I need to go to work early. Who did your mom have you stay with after school before I started living with you?”

Izuku eases up off of his back and sits on his heels, humming thoughtfully. “Sometimes the neighbors, but there was an after school program she normally had me stay at.”

“Anyone else?”

“Sometimes she’d let me go over to Kacchan’s and Auntie Mitsuki and I would watch TV if Kacchan didn’t want to play.” His eyes light up and he rolls off of Shouta to crawl around to see him face-to-face. “Mr. ‘Zawa, can I go over to Kacchan’s?! Maybe he’ll want to play since we’re friends again!”

Shouta doesn’t want to have Izuku around Bakugou anymore than necessary, but he also can’t take Izuku with him to work. Inko would kill him if Izuku caught sight of any of the gorier case files, and he’s too smart to be entertained by his own imagination for long.

“Don’t suppose you know the Bakugous’ number off the top of your head, do you?”

“‘Course I do! It’s Kacchan’s number!”

Izuku rattles it off easily, bouncing in place as Shouta dutifully dials.

A gruff, somewhat familiar voice barks out, “Mitsuki speaking, what do you want?”

“Mrs. Bakugou, this is Shouta Aizawa. I’m - “ he pauses, thinks for a minute, and decides on saying, “I’m Inko Midoriya’s roommate. I have Izuku here with me while Inko’s busy, but I just got called in early for work. I was wondering if you’d be able to watch him until Inko gets home.”

“Shouta Aizawa, huh? Since when does Inko have a ‘roommate’?” Even if Shouta wasn’t familiar with the Bakugou’s brand of abrasiveness, he would’ve been able to sense the air-quotes in her tone. “Put Izuku on the phone.”

“Sure.”

Izuku takes the phone eagerly and chirps, “Hi Auntie Mitsuki! Can I come over and play with Kacchan while Mr. ‘Zawa’s at work? I’ll bring my action figures and the tupperware that Mom always says she needs to give back to you but forgets every time.”

Mitsuki says something on the other end, likely along the lines of, “Who are you with? Are you safe? Say something about your math homework if you need me to call the cops.” Shouta tries not to be too impatient when he knows he would do the same thing if a kid he knew was with someone he had never heard of.

“Mr. ‘Zawa’s lived with us for a long time. Since before summer break. He teaches me self-defense and he’s the best EVER, Auntie, and he watches me when Mom can’t. No, Mr. ‘Zawa doesn’t like girls so he and Mom aren’t married.”

More silence. Then Izuku turns shining eyes up to Mr. ‘Zawa and asks, “Mr. ‘Zawa, Auntie Mitsuki asked if you were trying to marry me since you can’t marry Mom - can we get married since you’re not marrying Mom?!”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I’m too old for you. Wouldn’t you rather marry All Might?”

“All Might’s definitely older than you so that won’t work,” Izuku says factually. “Plus, All Might doesn’t share his gummies with me! You do!”

“You can do a lot better. Now can you please finish reassuring Mrs. Bakugou that I’m not a kidnapper and that I really do need her to watch you for the evening? I need to get to work.”

Somehow, Shouta convinces Mitsuki to take Izuku for the evening and gets her address.

It’s odd how quickly he can fill up a backpack for Izuku to take with him. He packs his homework, his new action figures, his goggles, some snacks, and an extra set of clothes just in case. At Izuku’s request, he also adds a storage container that has been sitting near the entryway since they first moved in and normally holds their spare keys. Apparently, that was and always has belonged to Mitsuki.

The Bakugous don’t live far away - just a bit up the street in the opposite direction of the school. Which makes sense, considering how long Izuku and Bakugou have known each other. Close proximity is how most children find their first friends.

Their house is either the exact same as it was when he had to make home visits to the students of 1-A or Shouta’s memories are blurry enough that any house would’ve looked like Bakugou’s. He rings their doorbell while Izuku vibrates with excitement next to him.

The door slams open almost immediately. Mrs. Mitsuki Bakugou is there, nostrils flaring and hand clenched tightly around the doorknob.

Little Bakugou is at her hip, hands shoved into his pockets and scowling as always - but his eyes are bright and lock on Izuku's form almost immediately.

Izuku waves excitedly. "Hi Kacchan! I brought my new All Might and Sir Nighteye figures so we can play!"

"Tch." Bakugou scoffs. He reaches forward and grabs Izuku's arm, tugging him inside. "C'mon. You can be All Might first if you shut up."

He lets himself get dragged along, tossing Shouta a hurried, "Bye Mr. 'Zawa!" over his shoulder.

"I said shut up!"

"Katsuki, don't be a brat," Mitsuki snaps, head whipping around to watch them leave. "You were all excited five minutes ago - 'Oh, Izuku's coming over? Don't bother us when he gets here, I want to show him my cool new - ' "

"Shut up, hag!" he yells, still dragging Izuku along. "I didn't say that!"

"What do you have that's new? I wanna see!"

The sound of a door slamming - Shouta assumes they've entered Bakugou's room and the tiny terror used all of the force in his tiny body to shut the door on Mitsuki's mocking - has Mitsuki rolling her eyes.

Shouta says, "Inko should be done with work around seven. She had to stay late today. Normally it's not an issue because my shifts don't start until eight at the earliest, but something came up. Appreciate you taking him on short notice."

Mitsuki visibly sizes him up. "So. Mr. Roommate. Stuck on nightshift?"

"Voluntarily. I'm not a morning person."

"Uh-huh," she says warily. "What do you do?"

It's still odd for his answer to be anything except, "U.A. teacher," especially when he's talking to the parent of a student of his. He says, "Hero work. None of the flashy stuff you'd see on TV. I'd show you my

license, but I'm in a hurry."

"Seriously?"

Shouta says, "I'll let Inko know to pick Izuku up on her way back. Izuku has her number if you need it."

"Oi, I'm not done - !"

He turns around and leaves because whether Mitsuki is done or not isn't his problem. It's a long shot to hope that there's information on Hisashi that's been rotting away on a backup drive, but he doesn't want to miss out on the miniscule chance that some type of clue will arise.

Mitsuki shouts after him, sounding just like Bakugou would during training. The annoyance it generates makes him feel nostalgic enough to feel the need to wrap her with his capture weapon and lecture her for recklessness.

The good old days.

father figure

Chapter Summary

Defining a family can be tricky.

Chapter Notes

a little bit of an early chapter this time! i've had some time off of work and got to rest, recharge, and spend some time ironing out some kinks in the next few chapters of this fic. i know i said like. 2 chapters ago. (2? 3? however many) that we were finally getting into plot, but i mean it this time!!!! we're almost there!!!

thank you for all of your support - and also!!! thank you all for your enthusiasm. it's really incredible to know that so many people are enjoying something i'm so passionate about.

really hope i keep holding everyone's interest, really hope you all had a good halloween, and really hope everyone's staying as safe and as well as you can during the wild time we live in. sending everyone a bunch of love <3

Hisashi Mori has a file a mile wide that says it was saved to one of the station's old backup drives about six years ago. According to Sansa, it likely was deleted from the main system during their annual file purge that same year.

"Data retention policies are outside of my pay grade," he said. "But I know that if there's files I want to save from year to year, I have to move them from my desktop to the network drive. It's a whole thing if you want to get it back, and if you forget about the file…"

"It disappears into the depths of your backup to only be discovered when you're stupid enough to let a hacker get in."

Sansa laughed and held his hands up. "Hey, I deal with good old-fashioned criminals. The high-tech criminals aren't my department."

Apparently, making sure that they don't miss important information by purging their data annually isn't his department either. The number of cases that have been dropped due to their garbage policies, accidentally or purposefully, must be astronomical.

It's a problem that Shouta will keep in mind moving forward, and it's

another reason for him to distrust the cops when they tell him they haven't heard anything about a case he's working on. He's half-tempted to send himself a copy of everything on the backup drive and see what has been missed just within this terabyte, but presumably any type of exfiltration will be harder now that they've upped their security.

Regardless.

It didn't take him long to find exactly what he was hoping for - a file for a man who could only be Izuku's father. It's almost too good to be true.

The picture of Hisashi Mori depicts a man with white hair and startling green eyes. Shouta had always figured Izuku got both his hair and eye color from Inko, but his eyes might be Hisashi's. It's easy enough to tell that the man in this picture is Izuku's father - Deku and him have enough similarities that the resemblance is pretty obvious in hindsight, but he doesn't think he would've noticed if he didn't already know they were related. Izuku clearly takes after Inko in most ways, though Hisashi and Izuku have an eerily similar smile with the only difference being that Deku's never looked as sly as Hisashi's picture does.

He was never arrested. He was a person of interest on a number of drug cases, has a noted assault charge that was dropped without have many details at all, and - most useful of all - remains a known affiliate of some American organized crime ring. Suspected leader, or at least someone with plenty of sway, but nothing concrete tied him to the group. Which, really, only makes it more likely he's the leader of it all. They're always the most careful to avoid any obvious associations with their dirty dealing.

He doesn't recognize the organization - the Will-O'-the-Wisp seems too a fanciful name for a drug cartel that dabbles in assassinations, and the incongruity is enough that had he known about the cartel the first time around, it would've at least rung a bell.

He'll have to do some digging. He's going to take Hisashi's file and anything else involving the Will-O'-the-Wisp for his own records - since clearly the cops can't be trusted to keep important information available - and go over it all with Inko. Maybe she'll have some insight from her interactions with the man that will give them concrete reasons to tie him to the group. And, subsequently, Hisashi's influence on Izuku won't be a problem anymore.

It feels overly optimistic to hope for that, but considering he hadn't expected to find a full name (he has a name for him, *finally* , he can work with that) maybe he has reason to be optimistic.

Patrol is a blur. The walk home is a blur. His flash drive is burning a hole in his pocket, and even though he knows Inko won't have time to go over the files with him until the weekend, he wants to have them on his own system for comfort's sake.

He gets home, saves the data on his own drive, and barely has time to take a short nap before Inko's knocking on his door and asking if he wants her to ask Mitsuki to take Izuku to school for the day.

"No, no," he calls out blearily. "It's fine. I got him."

"Are you sure? She won't mind," Inko insists. "You got in later than usual last night, and if you need the rest - "

"It's fine."

"She was really happy to see Izuku again. Asked why I was letting someone so rude stay with me, but she was delighted that Izuku and Katsuki seem to be getting along again."

Shouta barely refrains from burying his face in his pillow and dozing off again. "Mm."

"Said something about you walking off in the middle of a conversation - "

"I had to go to work," he says, finally pushing himself up and out of bed. He's still in his jumpsuit from the night before - hell, he hadn't even taken his capture weapon off. "She was being chatty."

When he opens his door, Inko's leaning against the frame and looking incredibly amused.

"She was very concerned that I was being taken advantage of by a creep pretending to be a hero."

"I object to most of that statement."

"Then," she continues, clearly biting back a laugh. "She told me that I deserved better than a… how did she put it? A 'shitty boyfriend who won't even admit that he's your boyfriend! He called himself your *roommate* , Inko, what the fuck - ' "

And, with that, Inko loses the battle against holding back her laughter. She bursts into peals of raucous cackles, having to use the door to hold her weight up. Shouta shoulders past her while shaking his head, but she latches her arms around his neck and giggles into his back.

Shouta drags her along with him to the kitchen instead of trying to shake her off. He says, “I don’t get why everyone thinks we’re dating.”

“Everyone?” Inko asks. She props her chin up on Shouta’s shoulder when he stops at the coffee machine and starts prepping their morning caffeine fix. “Who’s everyone?”

“Hizashi and Nemuri thought we were dating too. Sansa - “

“Sansa?”

“The guy at the police station.”

“Shouta, I was absolutely trashed. You know I barely remember any of that.”

“‘Any of that’ meaning, ‘I am claiming I don’t remember getting arrested so no one can give me shit about it - ‘ “

“Oh shut up,” she grumbles. She finally lets his neck go so she can dig through their cupboards for clean travel mugs, sliding them over to him one-by-one. He obligingly fills both of them to the brim, dumping a handful of sugar into his after handing Inko hers. “There’s a difference between getting arrested as a moronic undergrad and getting arrested as an actual adult with a kid. You can’t blame me for wanting to pretend it didn’t happen.”

“I assure you, I will literally never - “ He turns and looks at her, making sure their eyes meet. “Never. I am going to emphasize it a third time, because that is how serious I am about this: I will *never* let it be forgotten that you were arrested for trying to rip off a guy’s dick.”

Inko punches his chest lightly. “You’re such an ass.”

“Never, Inko. That’s a story that I’ll tell Izuku’s grandchildren.”

“Please don’t make me think about my baby growing up any faster than he already is,” she moans, clutching her mug to her chest. “He’s getting so big, Shouta. Just yesterday he was asking me how to spell

‘Mighty Boy’ and ‘All Might Junior’, and now he’s talking about the pros and cons of heroes having a pilot period before being allowed in the public eye.”

“In your defense, he is still extremely small. It’s just that brain of his that’s big.”

“He’s so smart it scares me sometimes,” Inko admits. She gives Shouta a reassuring grin when his eyes cut over to her quickly. “Not in a bad way, but in a, ‘how the hell am I going to handle a kid who’s smart enough to avoid getting caught’ kind of way. He’s going to get away with so much crap just because he’s smarter than his mom.”

“You’re not exactly a moron. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“A glowing endorsement, thanks,” she replies dryly. “Just for that, I’m delegating his first breakup to your capable hands.”

Shouta can’t actually remember if Deku ever dated anyone the first time around. He has vague memories of him and Todoroki sharing secretive smiles, but he also can clearly remember the way he, Uraraka, and Iida gravitated around each other. Too many people to count were devastated by his death, but he remembers those three in particular struggling in the aftermath.

“You think you’ll still want me around that far down the line?” Shouta asks. “And here I’ve been doing my damnedest to get on your worst nerve. Guess I’ll have to work harder.”

He’s just finished twisting the cap of his mug closed when Inko says, “Hey, don’t - don’t say that. Don’t - “ Her hand darts out and wraps around his bicep, voice cutting off abruptly. He looks at her and blinks in surprise.

“What? I was just kidding.”

“You kid about it a lot.”

“Does it bother you?” he asks, brow furrowing lightly. “I’ll stop if it does.”

“The implication behind you joking about it bothers me. You know that this isn’t temporary, right?” She waves vaguely at the space in between them. “It feels like you have one foot out the door some days. I thought for awhile it was because you were so high-strung about Hisashi and the suspected break-in, but you’ve calmed down

significantly since you set up the alarms on the windows."

The alarms did make him feel better. It had taken him a week after Izuku finally was declared flu-free to get the wiring and parameters for his makeshift security system set up to his satisfaction, and the time spent was well worth it in his opinion. He sleeps easier now knowing that if a window is opened by anyone except him or if their door opens when all of them are inside, he'll be alerted immediately.

He had thought things were going well, but clearly this is something that has been bothering Inko. She's looking at him as if she's searching for something on his face. "You have to know that I'm planning for our future to include you from now on. Mine and Izuku's."

At his flat silence, she says, "Right?"

He blinks again. "Uh."

Inko's grip tightens. "Shouta. You *know* that. Right?"

His mouth is weirdly dry. He swallows, but that doesn't help much. "I wouldn't want to presume. Things change. Situations change. Maybe at some point you'll find some guy who you want to marry and give Izuku a father. I don't want to assume that I'll..."

"That you'll...?"

He tries to shrug off her grip, but she keeps a tight hold of him. He looks away and shrugs. "I dunno. I just don't want to overstep."

Inko mildly says, "You realize it's that attitude that has Izuku convinced that you'll leave without a word some day, right?"

His eyes snap over to hers. She's giving him a bland look - but, if he's not mistaken, there's some sadness in her gaze. It's enough to shame him into lowering his eyes. "I. I wouldn't do that."

"No, you just think that we'd ask you to."

"I don't want you feeling obligated - "

Inko slams her mug onto the counter and uses her newly freed hand to grab his chin, forcing him to look her in the eyes. Once his eyes are looking at hers, her grip loosens into a gentle caress, cupping his chin and jaw.

"We love you," she says firmly. "I told you early on when we first met

that I wanted you to be family. You have been for awhile, but in case it needs to be said explicitly - You are family. *Our* family. That's not in question, nor will it ever be."

His voice is choked up as he says, "You don't know that."

Something about that visibly pains Inko, and he wishes he could take it back when it puts a look like that on her face. "I do," she says. "You don't have to believe me right now. You're a Midoriya in all but name, Shouta, and it seems like you're the only one uncertain of that. I'll keep reminding you, but I need you to at least try to remember. You can't keep making jokes about when we'll kick you out, because it's not going to happen and it just upsets all of us."

"Inko - "

"I have to go to work," she interrupts him immediately. "And I don't want this to turn into an argument. I want you to think about whether you actually want to be a part of this family or not, and if so in what capacity, because it's not on my or Izuku's end that you're not settling in completely. It's on yours."

"I'm not - "

"We've been dancing around the fact that you've stepped up in helping raise Izuku for long enough. And obviously we're not dating and never will be, so yeah, I might end up dating someone and Izuku might get another parent." She lets out a long gust of air. "But that doesn't mean that you don't have a place here. I'm not saying it's as his father figure or anything like that if you're uncomfortable with it, but I'm not saying it's *not* either." Under her breath, she quietly adds, "It's not like Hisashi's doing that great of a job, after all."

"I don't know what you want," Shouta admits, stunned by the direction this conversation has taken. "I don't know what to say."

"Think on it. Not what I want, not what Izuku wants - What do you want?"

She pats his cheek lightly, picks up her mug, and heads towards the door. With a yelled, "Bye Izuku! Remember to tell your teacher that Thursday's the only night I can do the parent-teacher conference!" she heads out to start her day.

"Bye Mom!" is yelled back from Izuku's room. "Mr. 'Zawa, can you help me look for my Ectoplasm folder? It has my writing homework in

it but it's not in my bag."

With that conversation lingering overhead, Shouta would take just about any excuse to think about a topic that isn't related to his well-known but oft-ignored abandonment issues. He says, "You left it on the dining room table again. Are you ready to go other than that?"

"Almost!"

It doesn't feel like Shouta has to think for too long on Inko's request, not when Izuku comes bounding out of his room and gives him a sunny grin while automatically reaching for his hand. He already knows that there's a disgusting amount that he would do to keep that grin in place, that he would cross a lot of boundaries to make sure his problem child lives as happily as possible.

He thought all of that was abundantly clear, but Inko's admonishment - *You're a Midoriya in all but name, Shouta, and it seems like you're the only one uncertain of that* - means it wasn't. Or there's something he's doing wrong.

Or - and this is the option that bothers him the most, if he's being brutally honest with himself - maybe in an effort to keep his secrets, he's closing himself off to such an extent that they think he doesn't care about them half as much as he actually does.

He squeezes Izuku's hand lightly and leads them out of the apartment, a heavy lump in his throat making it hard to respond to Izuku's eager optimism for the day.

what am i to you?

Chapter Summary

A walk to school goes badly.

Chapter Notes

me: dang i really hate writing action scenes this blows
also me: the show is literally 95% fighting scenes *what did you think you were going to be writing when you wrote a fanfic for Action Heroes Who Fight a Lot?????*

hopefully you all enjoy the action more than i liked writing it. i think it turned out okay? (obviously this isn't my wheelhouse lmao)

thank you for reading, thank you for the kind words, thank you for the kudos, and just. thanks in general <3 i go back to work tomorrow after 2 weeks of vacation and while i'm SUPER not ready for it, i'm glad i was able to get another chapter out before heading back <3 (and before anyone freaks out because of the cliffhanger, i already have the next chapter written so once it's edited i'll have it out to you either later this week or this upcoming weekend. no one will be left in suspense for too long!!!)

The walk to school is painfully normal considering the heavy weight that's been plopped in Shouta's lap.

Izuku's chatter barely keeps him in the moment, and even then, Shouta doesn't do much else other than give him a halfhearted, "Hm," and grunt in the appropriate places, face mostly hidden in the folds of his capture weapon. Izuku swings their connected hands back and forth as he talks.

A rundown park with a slide, a sandbox, some swings, and not much else is nestled between rows of office buildings for sale. It marks their halfway point to school and is generally when Shouta starts any conversations that they need to have before Izuku starts his day. Two kids, a little younger than Izuku, are in front of the slide and loudly debating whose turn it is to push who on the swing. The adults watching are visibly ignoring them, either scrolling through their phone or chatting among themselves.

The sight of parents and children feels like a sign to finally ask the question that's been bubbling up since his conversation with Inko. He steels himself and forces his mouth to say, "Izuku, can I ask you something?"

Izuku's voice cuts off from his tirade about how terrible it is that his favorite cereal brand changed their design. He tilts his head back far enough that he can see Shouta's face, and beams at him happily. "Sure thing, Mr. 'Zawa!" he chirps. "You answer all of my questions so if I can answer one for you I wanna answer it."

"What am I to you?"

His head cocks to the side. "What are you to me...?"

He attempts to clarify with a lame, "Like. Inko's your mom. Bakugou's your friend. So, what am I?"

Izuku ponders this with the same gravity most heroes consider how to save a civilian from a burning building. He bites the edge of his thumb like he's looking at a particularly troublesome conundrum. The hand that's still holding Shouta's slowly stops swinging.

Shouta waits.

After a few moments of contemplation, he pops his thumb out of his mouth and gives Shouta a bright smile. "Mr. 'Zawa's my hero."

His lips quirk up into a lopsided smile. It's not what he was looking for, necessarily, but the earnestness is enough to lighten his mood. "Your hero, huh?"

Izuku adds, "And my family, just like Mama," which is a little bit closer to what Shouta was hoping for.

"Yeah?"

"Mm-hm!" He starts swinging their entwined hands together again. "What am I to you, Mr. 'Zawa?"

He hums and pretends to think about it. "You're my…" he drags it out until Izuku is bouncing on his heels and fidgeting eagerly. "Mmm. I'd have to say that you're my precious problem child."

"'Problem child,'" Izuku repeats. "Why's that?"

"Because you're too smart for your own good, and I know you're

going to cause me a lot of trouble."

"Whaaaat? I won't!" he insists, squeezing Shouta's hand tightly. "I wouldn't do that to you, Mr. 'Zawa! Why do you think I'm going to cause you trouble?!"

"Call it my psychic intuition."

"You don't have a psychic quirk!" he wails, tugging on Shouta's shirt with his free hand and halting their walk. "Mr. 'Zawa, I promise I won't cause you any trouble! I'll be really good, and I'll work really hard, and I'm going to be a hero that you'll be proud of! I promise - "

"Hey, hey," he soothes, reaching over and ruffling his hair lightly. Inko definitely had a point about limiting his jokes, especially considering how sensitive Izuku has been since they finally got him to talk about his unauthorized calls with Hisashi. "I'm sorry, I was just teasing. You're a good kid, 'Zuku. I know that."

Izuku sniffs and scrubs at his eyes - thankfully he wasn't fully crying, but he had started tearing up. "You mean it?"

"I don't say things I don't mean," he repeats for the millionth time. "You're a good kid, and if you keep working hard, you're going to be a great hero. I mean it."

In a perfect world, they would have arrived at school without any further incident. Izuku would run off, reassured that Shouta both cares and believes in him, and Shouta would go home to nap. For a long time, he's pretty much been living in that perfect world - so it's, unfortunately, almost understandable that his time in it is up.

Like a giant alarm clock signaling the end of their calm mornings, the ground begins rumbling not even two moments later.

The park that Shouta had absentmindedly been aware of goes silent as the chains on the swings rattle and the slide starts toppling over. The kids that had been arguing immediately start running towards the group of parents. Thanks to the growing number of "in any emergency, go find the nearest adult that isn't using their quirk to cause said emergency, and have them decide what to do," training assemblies children are forced to sit through in school, Shouta won't have to run and chase after panicked brats.

Small mercies.

He can't see any immediate threat - if he didn't know better, he would think they were in the middle of an earthquake. The buildings around them are wobbling in a way that makes him glad the area is more or less unpopulated except for him, Izuku, and the park-goers. The rumbling grows slowly, and it quickly gets harder and harder to stay on his feet.

Maybe that's why he isn't quick enough to grab Izuku. He reaches out, hand grasping at Izuku's shoulder-scarf-arm-head-whatever he can reach, but he lurches sideways as the ground shakes under him and misses his chance. In the same moment, Izuku gasps and says, "The sandbox!"

"Izuku - !"

The ground breaks.

A chasm forms between him and Izuku, the world between them just - dissolving. Shouta tries to lurch forward, to get to the same side that Izuku is on, but something grabs him by his collar and flings him backwards.

He hits the ground *hard* . It feels more like he fell from a three-story building than him being tossed back about ten feet. The gulch grows rapidly, widening and sucking up trees, debris, sidewalk panels - no park-goers, as they've clearly booked it in the opposite direction. Shouta blearily wonders if they'll call for help or just assume that a hero will show up.

Izuku is also running. Unlike anyone with a sense of self-preservation, he's running parallel to the disaster and towards the park.

The park that's between two tall buildings that have seen better days and can't possibly be structurally sound.

Shouta catches his breath enough to yell, "Izuku, get OUT of here!" and then blinks the stars from his eyes to see Izuku blatantly ignore him and keep running towards the park.

"Am I not interesting enough?" Someone says coyly from behind him. "I really thought that this display would catch your attention, Eraserhead. I shouldn't be surprised, though. That kid is sinfully cute."

It's a not-so-subtle push to make him react. Even as it makes his metaphoric hackles rise, even as that sort of tone being directed

towards Izuku makes him want to shout - he's too good at what he does to rise to the bait.

He instead slowly gets to his feet. Turns around so he's facing whoever has put his child at risk, and activates his quirk in the same go. "All of this for me? You flatterer."

Shouta doesn't recognize this woman. Not from any of his current cases, not from any event in his past - nothing about her appearance rings a bell. Her face is unremarkable except for her eerie, icy blue eyes. Her hair is painful to look at - an orange so bright that it makes him want to squint. She's not wearing any of the typical glitz-and-glam of villains that want to attract attention.

If she hadn't called out to him, Shouta would've assumed she was just another pedestrian. She's wearing sweats and a sports bra - a normal outfit for a young woman to be wearing at this hour for a morning run. She even has a fanny pack around her waist to add to the illusion.

"Well, you're a hot topic right now," she responds, cocking her hip to the side. "People are talking about you. The guy who took down Chisaki. The guy who has a bargain with the Shie Hassaikai. That's not even touching on the rumors going around that you're on your way to 'untouchable' status amongst the underground." She gives him a saucy wink. "The boss would have my head if I underestimated you. Wanted to make sure my bases were covered and I made a good impression."

"Consider me impressed," he deadpans. "Attacking a playground. Only criminal masterminds do that."

Ms. Sweatpants mimics a stab through the heart. "Ouch. That really hurt, bud. Not sure I'll survive that one."

"So, what? You're here just to scope me out?"

"Ah, not exactly." She gives him an almost apologetic glance, but it clearly is meant to be mocking. "I know you think you were distracting me so that kid could get away - which kudos, honestly, you heroes are something else - but I'm not the one with the dirt quirk."

Shouta's head whips back around, scanning the surrounding area for her accomplice. In the same move, her quirk returns - most likely something telekinetic, which he knows because she immediately uses it to fling him into the air.

He gets a glimpse at the park as he's mid-air and sees Izuku. The entire park is surrounded by holes and fallen playground equipment, and Izuku somehow got himself into the middle of it all.

Where, of course, there's a scared kid. Their back is to Shouta, but he can see the kid trembling as they try to get to their feet. Izuku is giving them an encouraging smile and holding out a hand - somehow, Izuku doesn't seem bothered by the shaking ground or the debris falling around both of them as trees start to topple. He isn't struggling to stay on his feet at all.

And, then - a little bit further away, he sees a man snapping his fingers in time with the cracks appearing on the ground. He's wearing a gray track suit with gaudy, obnoxious orange sneakers. His eyes are locked on Izuku, but he's making no move to get closer. It's like his feet are glued to the ground where he is.

Shouta's breath leaves him in a rush when his back slams against a tree. He crumbles to the ground, ignores the way his head is throbbing, and looks up enough to cancel the guy's quirk. Immediately, the rumbling ends. A few trees finally lose the battle against gravity - none of the ones closest to the kids, but those aren't looking too well, and there's glass and random items from the surrounding buildings' balconies that are raining from above them.

Sweatpants walks closer to him and shakes her head. "You're really useless against more than one opponent. I mean, we figured you would be, but still. It's kinda pathetic. You're pretty much quirkless against me when you're erasing his quirk."

Her quirk must have some proximity requirement, or a cooldown period. Otherwise she would just whip him around to her heart's content rather than walking closer to him.

Shouta thanks his paranoia for making sure he doesn't leave the apartment without his capture weapon. The first time around, he would take it off whenever he went somewhere as a civilian. Up until Deku's death, he let himself have that semblance of normality.

Then Deku died, Shigaraki effectively became a dictator, and Shouta wouldn't have been able to playact a civilian even if he wanted to.

Even now, in this time of relative peace, he isn't a civilian. And he shows that to this amateur who thought attacking a pro's family was a smart idea.

His scarf wraps around her ankles in one swift move, and he pulls her towards him quickly. By the time he's back on his feet, she's sailing towards him with a startled yell. Smashing his fist against her face and immediately slamming her to the ground gives him a sharp swell of satisfaction, and it doesn't require him dropping his quirk at all. They're moves he could do in his sleep, and she clearly isn't skilled enough to need anything more than the basics. A single kick knocks her out cold, and he drops her limp body to the ground without any fanfare.

He looks around for any way to get over the chasm to reach Izuku without blinking, but his field of vision is limited when he has to keep staring at Mr. Track Suit.

The guy doesn't even look bothered. He, if anything, seems amused. His hands are resting on his hips, and his eyebrow's quirked. He's probably thinking, "I can wait, Eraserhead."

He doesn't want to blink.

He can't blink - what if he knocks a building over, what if he destroys the entire area, what if he hurts Izuku - but his body isn't listening to reason.

Shouta blinks.

Track Suit snaps his fingers, and the sandbox disappears into a well-placed hole.

Shouta uses his scarf to latch onto the building that looks somewhat more stable, using it as a makeshift lasso. It's never easy to fling himself around like Tarzan, but it's possible, which is all he needs at this point.

Izuku must have coaxed the kid out of the sandbox, because both of them are scrambling away from the edge of the hole that's growing wider and wider. The kid, predictably, slips even with Izuku's hand in his own and trying to hold him steady.

Shouta calls his scarf back and does a forward roll, landing close enough to the kids to snatch them up. One in each arm, he books it towards the enemy and stares him down, quirk activating.

"Mr. 'Zawa! Mr. 'Zawa, there's - !"

"Not now," he says shortly. Mr. Tracksuit doesn't look very panicked.

He should, considering how red Shouta's vision is getting.

"But - !"

"Not. Now."

The kids are deposited haphazardly in a safe patch of grass that is at least ten feet away from any cracks in the ground. He keeps running, eyes locked on the villain.

Track Suit goes down even easier than Sweatpants did. Even as his head bangs against the ground, he just looks at Shouta with a wry acceptance, as if he had no intention of fighting back no matter how this confrontation went.

"Sure you want to waste your time with me?" he asks, voice hoarse in a "smokes a pack a day" type of way. "Far be it from me to criticize a pro, but…" He nods at something behind Shouta, a sardonic grin playing at his lips.

For a split second, Shouta can't think past his rage. But he's a pro for a reason, so he pushes the rage down and flies into action. He knocks the guy out before his eyes give out, drops him without care, then spins around - all in one motion, which still takes too much time.

The building he had swung down from clearly wasn't as stable as he thought. It was falling over like a goddamn jenga tower, or like a structure built out of legos that some kid decided to topple with a single hit.

Two kids are right in its path. So is he. All three of them are looking at a grisly end if he can't think of something fast.

His heartbeat hammers in his ears like a drum as he readies himself. Half a second for a breath, then he flies into motion. His capture weapon wraps around both kids, and in a maneuver that will work because it *has* to work, he uses his own body as a fulcrum to fling them as far in the other direction as he can. His weapon unravels as far as it can without detaching from him - a safety mechanism to make sure no one would be able to take it from him in a fight without using quirk-enhanced strength - before moving to deposit his cargo in a less-than-gentle landing.

He doesn't know if he did anything except daze the poor kids, but at the very least, they have a better chance than he does. He pulls his scarf back, not because he thinks he's going to win in a fight against a

collapsing building, but because there's a chance that he can get himself out of trouble too.

Except at the last second, Izuku's hands wrap around the cloth and *tug* .

Whether it's the remaining momentum of Shouta's actions or his quirk finally emerging, Shouta can't tell. Things are too crazy - there's crap falling from the sky, the shadow of a falling building looming overhead, the twice-over concussion that Sweatpants gave him - and it's hard for him to think past the sudden feeling of being airborne in between all of the hectic chaos happening.

He rolls as he lands, manages to wrap both arms around Izuku and his rescuee to shield them with his body, and he does his best to shove them as far forward as he can while still covering them. Even if they could all get to their feet, there isn't enough time to outrun anything at this point.

There's a horrific crash - loud enough that it makes Shouta's head throb - or, wait, that might be the piece of rebar that went flying at his head, or the feeling of bricks - metal - something heavy landing on his leg and crushing it, or maybe it's Izuku's shrieking that is so horrible to listen to, his cries of, "Mr. 'Zawa! Are you okay? Are you - " except no, his shrieking would be better than the sudden silence in the middle of his question because that means Shouta didn't protect him well enough and there's blood on his small, freckled face, and the other kid is crying silently and looks like Hitoshi, of all people, which really says something about the concussions and head trauma that Shouta knows he must have at this point.

He tries to stay awake. He tries to give Not-Hitoshi a reassuring grin, he tries to carefully pat Izuku's head, he tries -

And, ultimately, he fails.

catheters aren't THAT bad

Chapter Summary

Shouta wakes up.

Chapter Notes

alright i guess i made you guys wait long enough <3 (aka: sorry it took me so long to get this out after leaving off on a cliffhanger, going back to work after 2 weeks of vacation was BRUTAL lol)

also thank you to the people who were being really nice about me writing action and said they liked it??? i super appreciate that b/c that was v much out of my comfort zone. this chapter we're back into the Feels and Fluff which is WAY more my home territory~

hope this chapter was worth the cliffhanger and wait, and hope you all enjoy <3

In TV shows, when a character is grievously injured and frantically sent to the hospital, they show flashes of poignant moments. Normally it's filmed as if the person is coming in and out of consciousness, seeing the face of a random EMT or the roof of the ambulance, or a glimpse of a grieving family member sobbing as they're wheeled into the OR.

Shouta's experiences are rarely like that. If he's going to the hospital, he's almost certainly unconscious and doesn't wake up until they've already patched him up as best they can and stuck a catheter on his dick. Sometimes, if he's really lucky, they give him the one that goes in his dick instead.

He's had more experience with hospital evacuation techniques than anyone should, in his opinion.

This is all to say - Shouta wakes up in the hospital, dazed and drugged up, with a weird pressure-but-not-really on his bladder, in an obscene amount of pain, but he doesn't have a clue as to how he got there. For a few seconds, he can't think past how miserable he feels.

Then, like a strike of lightning, the more important matters come rushing back to him. He sits straight up, against the painful protests his body makes, and he immediately chokes out, "I-Izuku - is he?

Where is he? Where's Izuku?"

Or, he tries to.

His success is questionable, considering the room is spinning and he's also coughing up a lung. There's even some black dots in the corner of his eyes, trying to lure him back to unconsciousness.

Joke's on those black dots - Shouta might be known for his ability to sleep anywhere, but with that came the skill of being able to resist sleep just as stubbornly.

"Hey, Shouta - Shouta, babe, take a breath. Can you hear me? Shouta?"

"Izuku," he wheezes, slapping at the hand that's trying to push him back. "Where?"

"I'm getting a nurse, okay? Just hold on - what's the use of a fucking call button if they don't answer it - "

"Izuku!" he repeats. "Where the fuck is my kid?!"

"OH!" Two hands reach out and cradle his hand in them. They're big and warm and though he can't say why, he's almost positive they're Hizashi's. His head tilts up enough to see blonde hair and black leather, so - yeah. It's Hizashi. "Izuku. He's fine. He's like, two doors down. He's fine."

Hizashi's stupid, though, so maybe he's wrong.

He tries to sit up again, because he *needs* to check for himself.

"Shouta, please - " Hizashi's voice, normally so loud and boisterous, cracks as he pleads. "I'll get him, but you gotta stop moving. You're not okay."

God, his hands are warm.

Shouta slumps back against the cheap hospital pillows and does his best to nod considering his neck feels like it could snap off at any moment. His entire body hurts, even with how much morphine they must be pumping through him. Thinking is difficult between pain and drugs and Hizashi's hands and worry for Izuku.

One of Hizashi's hands brushes through his hair quickly, and then he's gone with a whispered, "I'll be right back. Okay?"

He nods as well as he can.

The room is cold, but hospitals are always cold. At some point, a nurse or doctor or someone comes in and asks pointless questions. They give him a general outline of what happened - a building fell on him and he's "lucky to have survived" is the gist of it. He's distracted by the table next to his bed that's full of colorful cards and flowers and random crap, which is much more exciting to look at than the bland maroon scrubs in front of him.

Then he looks down at his lap and is torn between grimacing at the many IVs and wires attached to him and crying at the sight of his yellow, pawprint colored blanket that has been carefully tucked around him.

"I'll explain this all to you again when you're a little more cognizant," the physician says softly. "Are you feeling alright, Mr. Aizawa?"

"Hm?"

"You look upset. Are you alright?"

Shouta sniffles and doesn't answer. He pets the blanket instead, which is a million times more calming and soothing than the weird gentle voice the doctor's using.

"Your emotions might be a little delicate for the next week or so due to a side effect of the quirk that was used to stabilize you. If you need anything or we can do anything to make your stay more comfortable, please let us know."

Nice of them to offer, but it's a hospital so it won't be comfortable regardless of what they try to do for him. He wants to go home and lay on the couch with Inko and Izuku on either side, and Hizashi in the kitchen baking since that's something he does now, and Nemuri can be there too if she really wants to be but she has to be quiet since his head hurts.

The door to his room opens.

The nurse/doctor/whoever smiles at those entering and says, "Looks like your family's here. I'll let you have some time with them. Like I said, if you need anything - " they do a motion with their hand that seems to mimic a phone, then waves on their way out.

They pass by Hizashi and Inko, who are on either side of his pale

problem child who's seated in a wheelchair that looks far too large for his tiny body.

Izuku is attached to an IV and has bandages peeking out of his sleeves and the neck of his hospital gown. There's a plaster on his face over his right eye - but the left one crinkles up in delight and he tries to leap out of his chair. Hizashi's hand is the only thing keeping his excitable body in place, and he says, "Alright, alright - you know they said you had to stay seated, little listener. Hold your horses."

"Mr. 'Zawa!" he calls out, waving both arms frantically. They look beat up but aren't broken, which seems bizarrely unnatural, considering how often Deku had torn them up. He must not have activated his quirk, then, or else he would be in much worse shape. Those months of severe injury every time Deku threw a punch - Shouta will consider his trip to the past mostly a success if he can make sure Izuku retains full use of his arms.

They aren't broken, and something about that makes his shoulders slump in relief. Before he realizes it, he's sniffling and wiping at his eyes. He says, "You're okay," except it comes out watery and pathetic.

Inko says, "Gosh, you're a mess. You get hurt, spend all week sleeping and worrying us, then you wake up and immediately cause a fuss. I s-should - "

Her voice gives out as she starts crying, her weak facade of casual teasing falling apart immediately. She covers her eyes with a hand and hiccups, shaking her head. Hizashi wraps an arm around her shoulders and pushes Izuku's chair up against Shouta's bed, which Izuku takes as permission for him to scramble up onto the bed. He reaches his arms out in front of him, visible eye teary and lip trembling.

Shouta can't look much better. He ignores the pain and reaches back, dragging him (carefully, he doesn't know how injured Izuku is, so he'd rather treat him like he's delicate porcelain than risk hurting him) into his lap and immediately pulling him into a gentle but firm hug.

He sobs.

"You're okay. You're okay," he repeats like a sacred mantra, burying his wet face in thick green curls that smell like antiseptic and dried blood and sweat.

"I t-thought - I woke up in the ambulance and I was so - I was so

scared! And they said you weren't awake and they didn't know when you'd wake up and, and, - " Izuku wails into his chest, hands clutching the front of his flimsy hospital gown tightly. "And they didn't know if you'd be okay! They didn't know! And then we got here and you wouldn't wake up a-and that was scarier! I'm sorry!"

Shouta feels arms wrap around him and sandwich Izuku between them. It must be Inko, because there's a hand tangling itself in his hair and urging his head forward to rest against a shoulder that is too short for it to be Hizashi's.

"You c-can't scare us like that," Inko scolds, though it loses its venom considering her voice is wobbling more than the building that fell on them was. "Okay? Not again."

He nods shakily into her shoulder.

"When you get home, I'm going to make homemade coffee jelly. I found the recipe while you were in surgery and I thought that you deserved it for making sure both of my boys came home. And I'm making sure you're listed as one of Izuku's emergency contacts. And I better be listed as yours, because I had to wait - " her voice gives out, and the hand in his hair tightens a little painfully. "Not again. Okay?"

He nods again.

Izuku quietly says, in a voice that makes his heart ache, "I'm sorry you got hurt 'cause of me."

Shouta pulls back just enough so that they can look into each other's eyes. He brushes Izuku's hair back and leans forward to press a soft kiss against his forehead. "You're okay," he repeats, exhaling softly and letting go of the rest of his worry. "It's all okay."

Izuku stares at him and reaches a careful hand up to brush at Shouta's cheek. His fingers come away wet. "You're crying," he says, dumbfounded.

"I'm relieved. Everyone I love is okay."

That sets off the Midoriya waterworks - and Shouta joins them, crying and laughing just a little bit because it feels ridiculous to cry now after decades of hardening his heart and even longer of chronic dry-eye. But it's cathartic, and crying with his family makes his heart feel so much lighter.

He looks over Inko's shoulder at Hizashi, who clearly hasn't slept in too long and looks too much like that first time they got coffee together. He's crying too, but his tears are falling almost silently. Shouta raises a hand and crooks his finger in a "come hither" motion.

Hizashi visibly hesitates.

"Everyone I love," Shouta croaks. "That includes you, idiot."

Hizashi's face crumples, and he's quickly moving to sit on the opposite side of the bed to the Midoriyas. He wraps his arms around Shouta from behind, bracketing him and just barely touching him as if Shouta will fall apart if he's too rough. He rests his head on top of Shouta's with the delicacy normally reserved for fine china and newborn children, and he lets out a shaky breath that feels like a physical manifestation of relief.

His room feels warmer already. His body's screaming at him, and his eyes are starting to droop, but he wants to bask in this for a little while longer.

Just as he's wondering if he will fall asleep like this, there's the sound of heels against linoleum, a few irritated shouts, and then the door slamming open. A familiar voice says, "You jackass, you made everyone cry!"

And, with that, his entire family is there.

He waves her in, and Nemuri joins their hug without bothering to wait for permission. She comes in from the side, one hand wrapping around Inko's lower back and the other around Hizashi's shoulders. Unlike the others that were trying to be gentle, she immediately starts squeezing tightly. She, of all people, would know that Shouta wouldn't want things to be too sappy for too long.

Nemuri plants a sloppy kiss on his cheek, then one on Izuku's head. "Hey, hey. What's with this round of tears? You all cried when he wouldn't wake up, now he's awake and you're crying again! You're gonna flood the place soon, you know."

"She says that like she wasn't crying too," Inko faux-whispers. "You should've seen it. All of her mascara was dripping down her face like clown makeup."

Nemuri gives a fake gasp and lets go of the hug enough to slam a hand against her chest. "Slander! Inko, baby, why would you lie like that?"

Her boisterous mood is enough to cheer the room up some. Inko leaves their hug and encourages Izuku to loosen his death grip on Shouta's gown. Izuku then sits up and wipes at his face with the back of his hand until Inko pulls out a handkerchief to gently clean him up. They don't seem to have any intention of leaving Shouta's side any time soon. Which is comforting, sweet, and also bodes well for Izuku's own recovery if he can be out and about at his leisure.

Hizashi is equally clingy. He doesn't let go, even when Shouta wiggles and tries to get a little more horizontal as his exhaustion starts to get the better of him.

"Sorry, just." Hizashi is struggling for words, which is a rare occurrence. His grip tightens a smidge. "Just a few more minutes."

Shouta leans into the grip and agrees, "Few more."

daffodils and vicodin (or maybe oxy?)

Chapter Summary

You have my thanks for keeping my son safe.

Chapter Notes

me, sobbing: and shouta called him HIS KID
every reader, clapping loudly: AND SHOUTA CALLED HIM HIS KID!!!!

- or, at least, that's the vibe everyone gave me with their comments on last chapter~ there's going to be a disgusting amount of fluff during this hospital arc i'm just letting you all know now. like. this wasn't meant to end up being as many chapters as it's ending up, but i can't bring myself to rush through their recovery and everyone's reactions to them getting hurt so.

welcome to like. a million words of people caring about each other <3

thank you thank you thank you for reading, commenting, liking, subscribing, doing what you do to support this. i really look forward to updating b/c i know that there's people excited to see where this goes, and that's really something special. <3

i'm on tumblr at mutalune if anyone wants to chat - i'm not on their super frequently, but i'm trying to check it more often so i can actually make fandom friends lmao.

hope everyone's having fun, staying safe, and enjoying the upcoming holiday season as much as you can when 2020 really is just. something else. <3

When Shouta next wakes up, it's either very late or very early. The others must have left at least a few hours ago, because his bed is cold and his blankets have been re-tucked around him. He can see moonlight trailing in from the window and light from the hallway peeks in from underneath the door. The hustle and bustle of a busy hospital ward is muted enough that he was able to sleep, but now he can hear footsteps scurrying about and some faint complaints from other patients.

Someone has helpfully placed the remote for the TV and lights just a few inches away from his left hand. He uses it to flick the overhead light on, fairly certain that he doesn't have a roommate that would be bothered by him doing so.

They must have eased up on the pain meds now that he's awake, because the colorful assortment of "get-well" items at his bedside table are much less enthralling than they were earlier.

For the most part, there's not anything out of the ordinary. Nemuri, practical as ever, provided a care package of jelly packs, applesauce, and other easy-to-eat items that the nurses won't disapprove of. There's also some construction paper that must be a card from Izuku. When he picks it up for closer inspection, he can see that the writing is a little shaky. It's understandable given Izuku's injuries, but he hopes he didn't strain his hands or anything in an effort to write, "Feel Better!"

Next to the card, there's a stack of books - paperbacks that look a little beat up and were likely bought secondhand. He'd guess those are from Inko, though he can't really say why. It just feels like something she would get as a gift, hoping to keep him busy so he stays in bed and doesn't aggravate his injuries. She's also the only one who would be bold enough to give him bodice-ripper novels as anything other than a joke.

The balloons that are gaudy, bright pinks and golds and silvers, could only be from Hizashi. No question about that.

The oddest item that has his attention is the humble bouquet of flowers, nestled amongst the other gifts. It's not large, or else he'd suspect it of being from Hizashi - yellow daffodils are his style, but he wouldn't be able to restrain himself to one type of flower, let alone only a few of that one flower. There's not many people that would give him a bouquet, knowing that he isn't one for sentiment like that.

The small bundle of flowers is tied together with a dark gray bow that's almost the same color as his capture weapon. Attached to the bow is a small black card.

Reaching for the card is difficult with his injuries but not impossible. He stretches until it feels like his arm will fall off, and he eventually is able to tug it close enough to read.

" *Mr. Aizawa,*

You have my thanks for keeping my son safe. He admires you greatly, and I find myself reluctantly growing fond of the man he looks up to so ardently. Rest assured that the perpetrators of this attack will be handled appropriately.

Keep in mind that disappointing my family means disappointing me. Considering your own fondness for them, I assume you have no intention of doing so and expect that you will continue to protect them the way heroes feel obliged to. I support your self-appointed duty and would prefer you live long enough to be worth the trouble of keeping you alive.

Therefore, be sure to limit your visits to the hospital. Even with my resources, I can only hold off death for so long.

Regards,

Hisashi Midoriya. ”

If he wasn’t so exhausted, Shouta thinks he might be pissed. The entitlement - the audacity of a message from a man who has never been there for his family, expecting Shouta to pick up his slack - is nearly outweighed by the less-than-subtle threat held in its contents.

Keep my family safe and happy, or your life is forfeit.

He’s had scarier threats with way uglier packaging. At least the daffodils will brighten the room up a bit.

And, perhaps foolishly, the threat makes Shouta feel better.

Hisashi’s motives are clearer now, and maybe some of Inko’s nonchalance about the situation is easier to understand. The man, though a criminal with connections that could make their lives very difficult, has made his priorities clear. He wants Izuku and Inko safe, and if that means making nice with a hero and keeping Eraserhead around, Hisashi’s willing to do so.

It’s so much easier on him when villains act like villains. Situations like this - where Hisashi may actually be trying his best to be a decent father, where he might have been talking to Izuku out of concern for his emotional safety at some random guy joining their family unit - make it harder for Shouta to remain stoic and unsympathetic.

He doesn’t want to sympathize with Hisashi. He wants to hate the bastard who hurt Inko and continues to hurt Izuku by half-assing their relationship. He wants to arrest him and eliminate the threat to the

Midoriyas' well-being.

He wants to be mad that Hisashi would threaten him, but it's hard to be mad when he's relieved that - even if he's shit at it - the man loves the Midoriyas. A dangerous but well-meaning father doing his best to support his family (again, even if he's shit at it) is a more soothing thought than thinking there was a boogeyman hiding under their bed, waiting to steal Izuku away from them.

It'll be less of a pain to doze and rest with that knowledge. He places the card back down on the side table and winces when that movement pulls at - well, everything.

Shouta barely remembers what the doctor told him yesterday about his condition, but considering Hizashi was as distressed as he was - and Hizashi isn't the type to get maudlin, he always seems to think that he (and everyone around him) is invincible - Shouta must be in pretty bad shape. The intense soreness, coupled with him being out for at least a week, points to him actually needing to stay in the hospital for a while.

What a drag.

Up until mid-morning, he naps on and off in between nurses coming in to check on him and make sure he's still breathing. They draw blood and take his temperature, shovel pills down his throat, force him to eat cruddy hospital food, and are all around great at their jobs while being terrible for his temper and attempts to rest.

He's grabbed the TV remote and, disgruntled, decided to give up on sleeping for the time being when visiting hours begin - and not five minutes later, he already has a visitor.

Hizashi wanders in with a box of doughnuts and pastries while greeting the nurses by name, passing sweets around and winking playfully at those he passes.

Shouta raises an eyebrow at him, which turns his already blinding smile into something incandescent. He slides into the uncomfortable chair left for guests like it was placed there specifically for him, and tosses a happy, "Morning, Shouta!" his way.

"Hi."

"How're you feeling? Any pain? I can ask Mara if it's time for your next dose."

“Nah.” He pauses and waits expectantly, but Hizashi only digs into his box of goodies and pulls out a plain croissant to start gnawing on. “You’re here early.”

“Mmhm!”

Buttery flakes of boring, plain pastry float down to rest on Hizashi’s disgustingly tight pants. There’s no explanation for his presence, and he doesn’t seem inclined to provide one.

Shouta sighs. Tries to keep his head up and wits about him, but he’s fading fast with the exhaustion that comes with a body desperately trying to heal. “Any idea when I can get out of here?”

Hizashi finishes his bland breakfast off with a satisfied hum. “Not yet. At least ‘til the end of the week, but maybe a little longer. Doc wants to keep an eye on you since the guy whose quirk put you back together is still new here.”

“Ugh.”

“Don’t complain,” he scolds playfully, swiping his hands down his front to dust off the croissant debris. “You’re lucky, you know. The guy with Mend - the quirk, I mean - he was supposed to start next month but happened to be touring the place when you got brought in.”

“Really?” he asks, head drooping a little and eyes feeling heavy. “Hm. Lucky.”

“Yeah. So you’ll stay here and do whatever the doctors tell you to, won’t you?”

Shouta grunts, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. His eyes are slipping shut quickly.

“Shouta. Oi.” This is accompanied by fingers snapping obnoxiously in his face, and he grumbles but obligingly opens his eyes to glare at Hizashi. “I mean it. You’re going to behave. Right?”

“Sure, whatever. Let me sleep.”

“Am I that boring?” he jokes. “I need you to listen up for just a minute. Okay?”

He reluctantly nods and forces his head up as much as he can.

“You had a *building* fall on you. You can’t play this off like it’s just a scratch. If that guy wasn’t here - if he hadn’t used his quirk - “ he visibly and audibly swallows. “You’ve had some close calls, but this. This was *really* close, Shou.”

Shouta doesn’t apologize, because he would never regret doing his damnedest to save children. He did exactly what any hero should do in his position. It’s not something he would change about himself.

It means that he doesn’t know what to say when Hizashi’s looking at him all desperate and sad and worried though. Which means he nods, which is the lamest response he could give.

Hizashi, blonde and infuriating and too soft-hearted for his own good, reaches out and carefully drags Shouta into a hug, tucking Shouta’s head under his chin and breathing out slowly. It’s like just having Shouta in his arms gives him permission to relax, because the tension drains from him almost immediately.

Shouta, in turn, tries not to melt into his warmth.

“You’re too stubborn to take care of yourself for your sake, so do it for mine?”

He wants to whimper at the tenderness and how terribly it makes his heart ache to hear how much Hizashi cares. Maybe he can blame the quirk’s side effects for the way he dopily nods into Hizashi’s shoulder and the butterflies starting a riot in his stomach.

It’s a little painful to realize that, had he been able to support Hizashi better the first time around, they could have been this close for decades. That Hizashi would feel comfortable enough with him to express his concern and care genuinely, as opposed to it hiding behind a facade of obnoxious, carefree boisterousness. It almost makes the stress of coming back in time entirely worth it, even it makes him feel selfish to admit it.

It’s equally scary to realize that as much as he is still working to make sure Shigaraki doesn’t rise to power again, his motivations are evolving the longer he’s in the past.

He wants Izuku to grow up safe, healthy, and happy.

He wants Inko to have a comfortable and happy life.

He wants to cultivate a better friendship with Nemuri.

He - God help him - wants Hizashi to stay close and keep hugging him like this forever, because he doesn't think he's ever been so comfortable in his life. There's no way Hizashi had been this good of a hugger the first time around or Shouta would have never gotten anything done.

These will, of course, all be easier goals to meet with Shigaraki out of the picture. But instead of hoping for a better future once he deals with the rising villain and assuming he wouldn't be one to benefit from it - his future had already been destroyed, he was already a man out of time, this wasn't for him, it was for his students that were slaughtered and the people he lost and everyone else - he finds himself anxious to finish Shigaraki off and start enjoying the time he has with his family.

Shouta doesn't remember having this drive the first time around. Maybe he did, and it was squashed under the constant stress of battling the League. Maybe he had it at one point, but it was weighed down with regrets and an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness that he couldn't shake even when things weren't terrible.

He's not entirely sure what caused the change, but something about living with the Midoriyas has given him the ability to hope. Instead of putting his ambitions on the next generation to pull off, they've inadvertently empowered him to take a stand when possible rather than assuming it was already too late for someone like him to act.

"What do they have me on?" he mumbles into Hizashi's neck. "I feel sappy."

"I think vicodin? Or oxycodone?"

"Must be oxy. That always makes me emotional."

"Aw, poor Shouta," Hizashi coos. He reaches up to pat Shouta's head, then pauses. "Wait, are you crying?"

"No," he lies immediately. "Shut up."

"Aw, babe~"

"Shut up. I'm asleep."

"Shouta~"

"You're disturbing my rest and therefore my recovery. I'll call the

scary nurse in to kick you out.”

Very dramatically, Hizashi pretends to swoon and cries out, “Noooooooooooo, anything but that!”

Shouta goes to respond and is cut off by a jaw-cracking yawn. He rubs at his eyes and yawns almost immediately after again.

“If you’re tired, I can head out and let you nap,” Hizashi offers. “I probably should’ve known you wouldn’t be up for visitors until a bit later. It’s always a pain trying to sleep in places like this.”

“No, it’s - “ he bites on his tongue and swallows a third yawn. “It’s fine. They don’t let me sleep for long anyway. You may as well stay at least until the next time they pull a Dracula on me.”

“You sure?”

Before he can answer, footsteps approach and someone says, “Actually, if you could let me speak with Eraserhead in private, I would be much obliged.”

Shouta groans. “What do you want? I’m injured. Leave me alone.”

Detective Tsukauchi gives him a placid, unassuming smile. “I really have to insist.”

it may be cliche, but there's a reason why bad guys go after the heroes' family

Chapter Summary

Tsukauchi talks about the elephant in the room.

Chapter Notes

i don't even know what to say tbh - like. the outpouring of kind comments since i went on my unplanned hiatus, the love this fic received even when i wasn't regularly updating, the kudos - this fic passed 10k kudos while i wasn't looking and that's something so incredible that i, a literal writer, can't find words to express how amazing that was to see.

i'm really thrilled that this fic was still being enjoyed while i took some time off. i cannot express how much it meant to me be able to read through everyone's comments and know that when i got back to this fic that there would be some people who would be as excited to get a new chapter as i would be publishing one.

i know now that i needed the break badly because i hadn't realized how much i was writing chapters with the mindset of "gosh okay i just want to rush through this so i can finish this" which isn't the point of what i'm writing! i want to write something fun and nice and finishing this fic would be awesome as fuck but my priority is writing something that i enjoy and that i'm proud to publish.

and lo and behold, now that i've taken a break, i'm SO excited to get back to writing this!!! i have some ideas for issues i didn't know how to resolve before my break, i'm in love with these characters again, and i spent the last two weeks being antsy during work because i just wanted to log off and go onto my personal laptop to start writing again. getting that passion back really means a lot to me.

i recently moved into a new apartment and it felt like the time to get back into my "okay we're gonna write a lil bit every day" habit that i got out of, so i'm hoping i'll be able to update again soon. thank you all for your patience, thank you for your support, and thank you for enjoying! i've missed this fic a ton while i was gone and i'm super excited for the next few chapters i have planned

< 3

sending every reader some love and support during the batshit era we live in~

In another life, Shouta thinks he might have liked Tsukauchi.

The man's dedication to his job is admirable. His intelligence isn't something to scoff at. His loyalty to All Might, his willingness to bend the rules while sticking to his own moral code, his general dry wit - these are things Shouta can and does appreciate in an ally.

If Tsukauchi wasn't using those traits to Shouta's detriment, he would have liked the guy.

"I have to rest. Doctors' orders," Shouta says stubbornly, crossing his arms and leaning back against his stack of flimsy hospital pillows. "Visiting hours are over. Go home."

"I have information for you regarding the incident - "

"The incident where a building fell on top of me?" he cuts in ruthlessly. "The one I'm recovering from? That one?"

Tsukauchi and Hizashi both flinch.

"I haven't even been awake for a full day yet and you're coming in to question me. Seems a little insensitive."

Tsukauchi sighs. "I wouldn't if I didn't have to, Eraserhead. You know that."

"Do I?" he asks. "Because all I know of you is that you were extremely pushy trying to get information from me about a case that wasn't any of your business in the first place, and now you're here doing the same thing again."

"And here I thought we were finally getting along. My mistake."

"Fuck off," Shouta groans, amused despite himself. "What is it?"

"It's - "

"Hey, no. No," Hizashi says firmly. He stands up and steps between Shouta's bed and Tsukauchi, crossing his arms. "No work talk. He's recovering. Whatever it is can wait."

“It can’t,” Tsukauchi insists. He steps forward so that he’s back in Shouta’s line of sight. He meets his eyes and holds up a manila folder pointedly. “Those buildings collapsing - It wasn’t a coincidence. You were being targeted, Eraser.”

Hizashi gives a sharp intake of breath. “Targeted? What do you mean?”

It’s said at the same time as Shouta’s, “Yeah, so?”

Both of them turn to stare at him.

“What do you mean ‘yeah, so?’”

“They made it clear that they were there for me.”

Their stares don’t abate.

“What?”

“What do you mean ‘they’?” Tsukauchi asks, visibly alarmed. “There wasn’t anyone else there for miles. No one else was found in the rubble, and normal rescue procedures were in place so no one would have been able to leave the area without being questioned and checked for injury.”

Shouta frowns. “There were two people there. Woman and man. The man had some sort of earth or ground-related quirk, and he was the one who brought the buildings down. He made a bunch of holes and chasms in the ground. The woman had a telekinetic quirk that was pretty limited but was enough to throw me around some.”

Tsukauchi grabs a pen from his pocket and starts scribbling on the cover of the manila folder. “Did they say anything about why they were targeting you?”

“They both made it clear that they were there on some higher-up’s behalf but wanted to meet me since I’m becoming more well-known in the underground scene.” At Tsukauchi’s questioning noise, he elaborates with a sigh. “I guess Chisaki was more well-known than I thought. I didn’t think I would be the one getting credit for his arrest, but something must’ve leaked, and I guess that was enough to put me on a number of undesirable watchlists.”

“Add your not-so-secret truce with the Shie Hassaikai…”

Shouta spreads his hands out bare and does some mock jazz hands. “A whole murder attempt just for little ol’ me.”

Hizashi steps between Tsukauchi and Shouta again, surprising both of them. “Either of you want to fill me in on what the fuck’s going on? Is Shouta going to be safe here? Should Nemuri and I start scheduling shifts to make sure he’ll be protected?”

Shouta says, “Absolutely not.”

Tsukauchi shrugs. “Wouldn’t hurt.”

“Absolutely not,” he repeats. “No one who wants to stay under the radar would be stupid enough to attack a hospital, not with how furiously they hire people with defensive quirks. It’d be a waste of your time.”

“Making sure you’re safe isn’t a waste!”

“You have - what, three jobs now? How many is it?” Shouta demands. “And Nemuri’s trying to get her name out there more. It’d be inconvenient - “

Hizashi interrupts him. Loudly.

“Are you fucking KIDDING me? Do you really think Nem or I give a fuck if it’s inconvenient? You almost DIED and whoever caused it is still out there!”

“I just don’t think it’s necessary - “

“You could be suffocating and say that oxygen isn’t necessary, I don’t want to hear it!”

Tsukauchi coughs loudly. His amusement is obvious. “Not that this domestic isn’t equally touching and amusing, but I do have more to discuss.”

“Fine, what is it?”

“Oh by all means,” Hizashi cuts in sarcastically. “Let’s cater to whoever the fuck this guy is! Who knows what he’s here for except to harass you - by your own admission - and stare at your - “

“You could have let me know you were taken,” Tsukauchi interrupts dryly, directing his statement to Shouta mainly. “I would have made sure to check with the missus before bothering you.”

“WHY’D YOU SAY THE MISSUS LIKE THAT’S SOMETHING BAD TO BE?!”

Shouta would really like to be unconscious right now. He looks longingly at the call button and wonders if the nurse that’s generous with painkillers is on duty right now.

“Look,” Tsukauchi finally says, cutting off Hizashi’s rant that had continued through his thoughts’ detour. “Chisaki’s potential benefactor. We talked about him last time. I would confidently bet that he was the one who organized this.”

That brings Shouta rushing back to the moment, all thoughts of drug-induced rest pushed away for the moment. “What makes you say that?”

“Who else would it be?” He flicks through his folder, listing as he reads. “Can’t be the Shie Hassaikai - not their style, and they were grateful for your help. Can’t be the Fujioka case you busted a few weeks back - they don’t have the resources to hire anyone who would be able to cause this kind of destruction. You don’t have any archnemeses on record. No known grudges against you. No one else you’ve put behind bars that would have the desire, time, reach, or money to make something like this happen without leaving a trace behind.”

It makes sense, but it isn’t something that Shouta wanted to hear.

All for One is not someone Shouta wants to deal with. That’s an All Might-sized problem that is way, way above his pay grade.

He doesn’t understand how he could’ve possibly gotten on the man’s radar. As far as he knows, he wasn’t on his radar the first time around until class 1-A started causing issues for the league and their plans. Surely he wasn’t that invested in Chisaki - at least not so early on when his research was still in its infancy. There’s numerous other doctors and researchers that would be able to do the same work that Chisaki was doing, and they’d likely do it better than his psychotic ass could.

Even if Chisaki wasn’t just a glorified project manager that kept the scientists on task, he’s still someone who could be replaced easily.

All understandable and rational conclusions that lead him to the terrifying thought that, with Chisaki’s research on hold, All for One might have decided that Shouta’s Erasure could be the key to figuring

out how to eradicate quirks. And if he was the benefactor for Chisaki in the first place, that means he had plans that relied on that research.

Not exactly a comforting thought.

“Hm.”

“I think you know who that benefactor is,” Tsukauchi says. He puts the folder down on Shouta’s lap and taps it a few times. “But I’m not sure you understand how dangerous that man is, and how being on his shitlist is *not* in your best interests. You seem like you’re trying to pull a lone-wolf act, but I assure you, that’ll be the fastest way to getting yourself killed.”

Hizashi’s breath hitches. Shouta meets Tsukauchi’s gaze head-on, unsurprised and placid.

“Talk to me. Tell me what you know and I’ll make sure there are people on your side.”

“I’ve told you everything I can,” Shouta says calmly.

“You’re being an idiot.”

“You’re annoying me.”

Tsukauchi’s breath leaves him in a rush. The guy looks exhausted. “Eraserhead. Please. This man isn’t a joke. He’s more dangerous than you can imagine.”

Shouta doesn’t have to imagine. He likely knows more about the threat All for One poses than Tsukauchi does - knows how the man groomed Shigaraki into a terrifying, ruthless monster that wanted nothing more than to crush the world under his boot. Knows that All Might must be starting to realize how his quirk is slowly dissipating, knows that it’s due to the last fight he had with All for One. Knows that there’s one more battle coming up that All Might won’t be prepared for but will do his damnedest to finish regardless, knows that All for One will go to Tartarus and laugh anytime anyone tries to ask him about the boy carrying his legacy, knows -

He knows too much.

“I’m aware,” he says blandly. “I’m just not sure what you think a single detective can do against someone like him that I’m not already

doing.”

“You already know I have connections.”

“Connections I’m not interested in. I have better things to do than cater to spotlight heroes’ egos just to get the slimmest chance of them giving up a few points to save my ass.”

Tsukauchi straightens up, and suddenly, his face is ice-cold. “You’re not naive enough to think that he’ll stop at attacking you. I know you’re not. Now, there’s already two boys in the hospital because he went after you. Who knows who else will get caught up in this mess?”

He reaches into his pocket, drops another of his contact cards into Shouta’s lap, and says, “When you decide you give more of a damn about your loved ones than your pride - call me.”

That, admittedly, cut a bit.

Actually -

Actually, it cut a lot.

His heart rate monitor starts beeping obnoxiously. He doesn’t give it more than a second’s thought, because All for One coming after him is one thing, but -

It’s been a long time since he’s had to worry about someone else’s safety relying on his own. In his old timeline, everyone he cared about was either dead or more capable of protecting themselves than Shouta was. That’s what happens when you’re a hero who teaches the next generation of heroes to be better than you.

Except Izuku isn’t a hero. He’s a child.

“Shouta - Shouta, hey, I need you to take a breath.”

They can’t protect themselves. They’re vulnerable, they’re visible weak spots, and how much of an idiot is Shouta to have forgotten that they would be in danger because of him -

“Shouta, babe, you need to calm down or you’re going to hurt yourself.”

“I’m sorry, Eraserhead. That was uncalled for.”

“Get the fuck out! He’s recovering from nearly DYING and you come

in here, getting him worked up! What the fuck is the matter with you? “

“I understand. I’ve handled this poorly.”

“Shouta, hey. It’s okay. Everyone’s okay.”

But *they* might not be, and his hands are trembling - they can’t tremble if he wants to keep everyone safe, if he wants to save everyone, what if he drops something or someone or breaks something or -

A new voice speaks up, soft and kind and *Inko* . “My mom-radar went off. Seems like someone needs some help.”

There’s a desperation to Hizashi’s voice that mimics the way Shouta’s inner thoughts are spiraling, which gives him an abstract sort of comfort. At least he’s not the only one who’s freaking out. “He’s never done this before, I don’t know - “

“It’s alright, Hizashi. Isn’t it, Shouta? We’re just going to breathe some. We liked the five-count last time, didn’t we? And look, you have the blanket Izuku got you. Why don’t you hold onto that?”

“I’m sorry,” he gasps, latching onto the blanket with both hands. He tries to focus on its texture and pattern, but his sight is getting spotty. “I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry - “

“It’s okay. We’re okay.” She wraps an arm around him and tugs his head until it’s resting against her chest. “Can you feel me breathing? Let’s breathe together.”

She counts. Slowly, even when his breath stutters and hitches and he stops to choke out an apology. One hand cradles his head gently, making sure it stays tucked against her while the other hugs him close. To the side, Hizashi is hovering and rubbing his back - a little awkwardly, but it’s something else to help ground him.

By the time the panic recedes enough for him to think coherently, his body is protesting and trying to drag him off to sleep. Inko must notice him struggling to keep his eyes open, because she says, “We’ll be here when you wake up. Don’t worry.”

“I don’t. I don’t want.” He swallows, hands still tangled in the pale yellow blanket but loosening as his eyes struggle to stay open. .

“I know,” Inko replies, even though she can’t possibly. “I know. It’s okay. We’re okay. You just focus on getting better.”

Even if his body wasn’t trying to force him to shut down and relax after an absolutely exhausting morning, he wouldn’t be able to keep his eyes open with how warm and soft he feels. He drifts off almost immediately, body limp and breathing quietly.

family is inconvenient, but when you choose your own - it's yours forever

Chapter Summary

Shouta finally understands Deku and why he won't exist this time around.

Chapter Notes

i have the kindest and sweetest readers in existence and literally no one will convince me otherwise??? it was a little scary coming back from hiatus but i should've known that you all would give me a warm welcome back <3

for real: thank you all for the support. i write for fun, but it's a much more rewarding experience knowing that you're all enjoying reading as much as i enjoy writing this silly stuff.

last chapter i came back with an angst-punch but now i am going to soothe it with fluffy family feels <3 this is a little overly sappy even for me, but this was an important scene to have even if on the surface it just seems like a "omg fluffy love omg <3" (i mean, it's that as well, but i swear there's plot reasons for it too!!!!)

additionally! someone in the comments asked how to contact me if they wanted to show me fanart. which like, first off: thank you for even thinking about doing fanart of my fic???? that's so sweet???? second - i'm pretty sure i have messages open to the public/anons/etc. on my tumblr, which is just mutalune . tumblr . com - i don't post there too often (despite my attempts to be more active on there...) but i do check for messages/dms/etc. even if i'm not posting, so that's the best place to reach me at! my email's also just mutalune @ gmail if you'd rather contact me directly, but the minute i get any sketch emails to that account, i will start sending everything to the spam folder... fair warning...

thank you all again <3 i hope you like the new chapter! i'm posting a little earlier than i normally would b/c i'm excited to be back, so don't get your hopes up that i'll be updating more than once every week (more likely, once every 2 weeks once i settle into a rhythm again), but here's a lil treat since i left off on such an angsty note last time lol

When he wakes up, everyone is there.

Inko, Izuku, Nemuri, and Hizashi are seated around him. Izuku is talking fervently to Hizashi, who is crouched next to his wheelchair. He's nodding very seriously and visibly doing his best to be a dutiful listener, which must be an interesting role-reversal for him. Considering his knee bounces every few seconds and at one point he shoves a hand over his mouth, it must be a Herculean task for him to shut that big trap of his and let Izuku babble.

Hizashi might have met his match in Izuku's enthusiasm. It's like looking at twin suns, shining and bright and ineffably warm.

On the other side of his bed, Inko and Nemuri are sitting in matching, likely uncomfortable chairs and chatting quietly. Inko's attention is mostly on Izuku even as she's talking, a multitasking feat that the most competent mothers figure out early on.

Nemuri, on the other hand, is completely focused on Inko. All of her body language is screaming interest in Inko - knees close together and pointed towards Inko, shoulders drawn forward, her eyes rarely leaving Inko's face.

Shouta briefly considers going back to sleep. Having to deal with the world outside of this room feels unbearable, and while the death grip of his panic has receded, there's an anxiety sitting in the pit of his stomach that wants to claw its way up his throat. He wants this moment of comfort and perceived safety to be all that exists.

There are conversations to be had, though. And as much as Shouta would like to be a coward, his throat is demanding water and he knows he's not well enough to get it himself.

"Hey," he croaks. If it wasn't due to him being in a hospital bed after a horrific panic attack, the way everyone's eyes lock onto him so quickly would be amusing. "Water? Please?"

All of them except for Izuku scramble up and start rushing around, talking a lot but saying nothing. Izuku stays seated - likely due to the pointed looks from every adult in the room when he shifted his weight like he would try - but beams at Shouta and carefully rolls himself forward until he's right up against Shouta's bed.

"Mr. 'Zawa!"

"Hi, 'Zuku," he says. He reaches out to pet his hair for a moment. It's

still hospital-stay greasy and likely will be until they're allowed to go home. "How are you feeling?"

Izuku leans into his touch, legs swinging happily. "I'm okay! The doctors said that they'll be able to take the bandaid off my eye tomorrow and we can see if I can still see out of it. They're pretty sure it's fine since I can see light and stuff through the bandage but they wanted me to keep it covered still."

Shouta's gut clenches. "They thought you might not be able to see? What happened?"

"They think something fell on it," he replies matter-of-factly. "Mom thinks I didn't hear them talking, but they said if it was anything like the rebar that hit your head, it could've killed me, so they're pretty sure it was a brick or something smaller."

Inko sighs and leans against the sink that Hizashi beat them all to. Nemuri leans next to her even though she'd only need to take approximately three steps to get back to her seat. Like a puppy trailing after someone carrying a snack, Nemuri keeps most of her focus on Inko with only occasional glances at Shouta.

Nemuri's never been one for worry, so he doesn't take offense to her distraction.

Inko, seemingly oblivious to Nemuri's gaze, gives Izuku a tired look. She says, "You shouldn't eavesdrop, baby."

He gives her a one-armed shrug. "I wanted to know."

If Shouta tries to think about every part of what Izuku said, he might have a heart attack. He instead shoves that information away to be dissected at a later date and asks, "How are you feeling about that? Sounds like it was pretty scary."

Izuku cocks his head to the side. "Well, I was more scared about you and the sandbox kid. He was really scared, and you weren't waking up. There was a lot of - "

"Heyyyyy, hey hey hey," Hizashi cuts in, plopping down onto the edge of Shouta's bed and handing him a glass with an obnoxiously neon curly straw in it. He drinks from it gratefully, glad that he doesn't have to lift the thing to finally gulp down enough water to moisten his throat. "How about we wait to compare battle wounds until you're both feeling all better? We should be trying not to stress everyone out.

Let's be grateful that you're both okay and that the hospital finally remembered to bring Izuku the red jell-o instead of purple."

Nemuri conspiratorially adds, "We really should be grateful for that last one. Izuku was not a happy camper when they kept bringing him the wrong jello flavor."

"Purple is gross!" he objects immediately. "And I wasn't rude, I swear! I ate it even though it was gross."

She raises both hands, attempting to placate him with a light grin. "You're right, you're right. You really have been a model patient. Between that and those freckles of yours, all of the nurses are enamored with you. A cute kid that actually does what he's supposed to is way more rare than you'd think."

Izuku's head ducks down, quick as a whip. The tips of his ears are red. "They're just nice. 'S all."

"I can confirm that they're not," Shouta says. "They certainly didn't ask me what kind of jello I wanted. They must like you."

His head shakes back and forth like a rattle. "Nuh-uh. Why would they? They're just nice. I'll ask them to get you jello though if you want!"

"Why would they, he asks," Hizashi says teasingly. There's no hint of a strain in his voice, but the furrow at his eyebrows says what his tone won't. He leans over and wraps an arm around Izuku's shoulders, squeezing lightly, then plants a smacking kiss against the top of his head. "Like he isn't the smartest, cutest kid around. Anyone would like you, 'Zuku-chan!"

The appeasing, "Okay, Mr. 'Zashi," that has none of the conviction that Izuku has in any other aspect of his life clearly breaks Inko's heart. Her arms, loosely crossed at her chest, tighten as her face falls.

It breaks his, too.

Shouta says, "Hey, can you come up here for a second? Hizashi, help him up?"

There's some finangling needed for it - their respect IV stands need to be maneuvered but not tangled, Shouta's entire left side is fragile, Izuku's legs are still sore - but eventually, between the four adults, they get Izuku positioned so he's seated as close to Shouta's lap as he

can get.

For a moment, Shouta looks at him and he sees Deku.

Deku was a weary, tired man who only ever wanted to do what was right. Who worked harder than just about anyone else to master a quirk that had some of the most devastating drawbacks Shouta had ever seen. Who would give the shirt off of his back to anyone who needed it, who would tear his body in two if it meant saving just one more person, who was a war cry and a symbol but had to be breaking on the inside the longer their tragedy went on.

A dead man, ultimately.

With the insight he has into Deku's childhood, he now knows there was no universe where he would have lived. Even if Shouta had been stronger-faster-better, Deku would have gotten himself killed sooner or later. When the only hope a child has for gaining respect and care is admiring and subsequently mimicking someone like All Might, it's depressingly understandable how they would start throwing themselves into danger with little regard for their own life. It's no wonder that Deku placed such little value on himself when no one except Inko had ever done so in his formative years. And Inko - single mother, working tirelessly, doing her best but ultimately so alone - could only do so much.

It's no wonder that he never understood how integral he was to their resistance with this context. If he had known how all of them - each and every one of them that had relied on him in different ways - would fall apart without him, maybe he wouldn't have been quite as reckless.

How could he have, though? When Deku grew up thinking that no one cared for him except for his mother - how could he have learned how important he was? They all loved him, but now -

Now, Shouta thinks Deku never knew. He never understood.

How could he?

Shouta tilts Izuku's chin up with a gentle finger until their eyes meet. "You are a kind, strong, and downright incredible kid. You are so smart that sometimes I can't keep up with you, and I'm working on a freaking master's degree. You have a bleeding heart that I imagine will get you in trouble someday, but it means you know how to make people feel cared for and special."

Izuku squirms and looks down at his lap, trying to dislodge his grip. “You don’t have to. Um. It’s okay. You don’t - “

“I do,” he cuts him off ruthlessly. “Because I haven’t made myself clear, you seem to be operating under some false pretenses. That’s on me, because I’m a moron. I literally just admitted that an eight-year-old is smarter than me, so we shouldn’t be all that surprised.” He waits until Izuku looks at him again, then softly adds, “But I’m going to remedy it now. I want you to listen to me for a bit. And you don’t have to say anything if you don’t want to, or you can yell or cry or leave or do whatever you feel you have to, but I want you to wait until I’m done. Alright?”

Izuku nods slowly. The others look just as confused as Izuku does, but they’re all quiet and have settled into the solemn mood with ease.

“You are good. You are kind, strong, intelligent, funny, and I like spending time with you. All of us do - “ he waves at the other adults. “Because you’re you. And even if you weren’t any of that - even if you were a brat, even if you were rude, even if you did things that we didn’t like - we would still care about you. Because all of the extra stuff? That’s just sprinkles.”

At Izuku’s confused look, Shouta releases his chin so he can reach down and poke his stomach lightly. “If you were a dessert, all of that’s sprinkles on top. Makes the whole thing look pretty, but it doesn’t really change the taste of it all. The gooey-chocolate-fudge core is what matters.

“For you, that’s how good you are. That’s the part of you that saw the kid in the sandbox and went back for him, because you didn’t want anyone to get hurt. It’s the part of you that gave both Bakugou and your father second chances after they hurt you. And it’s the part of you that does things like give me a blanket because you think I’ll like it, or clean out your mother’s favorite mug before bed so she can have it for work the next morning, or make a bunch of pictures for Hizashi so he can get better faster. You with me still?”

He nods again. There’s a little bit of bewilderment there, but he’s not rejecting what Shouta’s saying out of hand.

It’s a better response than he had hoped for. Especially considering his lackluster, hastily-thought-of metaphor.

“You are good,” he repeats firmly. “And I love you.”

Izuku's eyes widen.

"I love you very, very much," Shouta reiterates, because it deserves to be said. "I'm not going anywhere willingly. I'm going to keep you safe until you're a hero that doesn't need my protection. And even then, I probably won't be able to help myself.

"I'm sorry that I took so long to say this to you. I don't want you to think that you can't do things like be upset or get sick or take a break because you're worried about what any of us will think of you. You could be the worst patient on the planet and scream and yell and make your nurse's life absolutely horrible, and we'd still love you. You could tell us tomorrow that you think heroes suck and you'd rather be a rodeo clown when you grow up, and we'd still love you. You're - " here, he falters. This entire conversation has been uncomfortably exposing, but this is the part that still makes a lump grow in his throat and is hard to force out. "You're my family. This - all of you here - are my family. I want us to be. Forever. Even if you're a problem child, even if I'm a grumpy bastard, even if everyone gives me a headache most days - I want us to be a family.

"I'm sorry that I made you think I didn't want us to be, or that I made you think that I would leave, or - I dunno. Whatever bad thoughts were bouncing around in your head, I'm sorry that I fed into them. I'm here because I love you and I want to keep you safe. And even though this is making me want to puke, I'll say all of this as often as you need me to. Alright?"

Izuku isn't crying. He's looking at Shouta blankly, eyes darting around his face like he's looking for any sign of deception. When he inevitably finds none, because this is the most honest Shouta has been in years, he blinks and looks absolutely gobsmacked.

After a pause, he grabs Shouta's hand - the right one, the one that has fewer wires coming out of it - and squeezes. "Alright," he agrees softly.

"Yeah?"

Izuku nods. Then, like a flower blooming, his face melts into a stunned, dazed smile. "Yeah."

"I love you," Shouta says once more, because it feels right.

That, finally, is what makes Izuku tear up. His eyes squint with how wide his smile is when he chirps, "I love you too!"

After that, there's a tight hug from Inko. There's crying from Hizashi who's grinning like a loon, there's Nemuri's hand carding through his hair in an affectionate gesture she hasn't done since they were in school, there's nurses and doctors coming in and checking on them, and there's the soft orange of a sunset at the end of a long day.

What matters, though, is Izuku's hand in his, and Izuku's weight against him, and the determination to keep this family - his family - safe.

there's more to the aftermath than just rubble and debris

Chapter Summary

Hizashi drives Shouta home and crazy.

Chapter Notes

honestly i can't think of much to say here, i'm so freaking tired. what's it like to have energy? i don't think i've ever experienced it

despite that, i have put together a chapter! hopefully my proofreading won't suffer too much from my exhaustion!

thank you all for reading <3 i'm always excited to post because i know there's at least a few of you out there who are excited when you get the email notification saying that i updated~

hope you enjoy! for all my erasermic fans out there, this is a fanservice chapter for you guys alone i'm p sure~

Going home after a long hospital stay is one of the best feelings in the world. No more scratchy sheets, no more crappy food, no more being woken up every two minutes by a nurse or doctor or patient, no more catheter…

Shouta's feeling good when Hizashi shoves him into his car to drive him home. It might be the prescription strength painkillers they fed him to make the ride home bearable, but the anticipation of getting to take a shower on his own and sleep in his own bed is exciting enough to act as its own painkiller.

Hizashi's babbling isn't anything new. He's used to riding the ebbs and flows of conversations with this man who tries to make being loud an Olympic sport. When he's talking, the room feels full. When he's taking a breather, the quiet is all the more dramatic for its contrast. As annoying as the boisterous energy can be, Shouta doesn't mind coasting along and being an audience for the blonde social butterfly.

What's new and weird with this car ride's "conversation" is the frenetic, almost hyperactive edge to his babbling.

He goes on and on about whatever they pass - *"Look at that sign, that's*

literally SO obnoxious to have a slogan like that, like who even gives a damn about white sneakers what a pretentious publicity stunt I bet that hero isn't even going to last the rest of the year!" - and then waits, tense, for Shouta to acknowledge whatever he said. Shouta will hum or grunt into the suffocating quiet, which is enough for Hizashi to start back up again.

Eventually, Shouta can't take the discomfort any longer. He lets his head loll to the side so he's looking at Hizashi rather than staring blankly out the window. Hizashi doesn't notice, words slipping out of his mouth as fast as he can move his lips, so Shouta sighs.

Seeing as there's no clean way to cut in, he ignores social niceties and interrupts loudly, "What's wrong? You know I've been taking my recovery seriously like you asked, so you can't be THAT worried about me. What is it?"

Hizashi's rambling cuts off and the tense silence returns for a few seconds. Then he says, faux-cheerily, "What do you mean? Like you said, you've been a good patient, and we're on our way to take you home and you get to nap - nothing's wrong!"

"You're an idiot," Shouta says. He reaches out just enough to brush his knuckles against Hizashi's elbow, rapping against it lightly the same way he would knock on someone's door. "What's rattling around in that empty head of yours?"

"Which one of us graduated with honors again?" Hizashi asks rhetorically.

"Empty head except for high school hero basics," he corrects lazily. "Come on. Out with it."

The car rolls to a stop in front of a stoplight. Not many people drive in this area, so the roads are pretty empty. Hizashi's luxury whatever-some-type-of-fancy car sticks out like a sore thumb, surrounded by suburban homes and underfunded community parks.

"I don't want to dump on you when you're still recovering," Hizashi finally says, eyes locked on the road ahead of him. It isn't going anywhere, so Shouta doesn't get why he's watching it so intently. "You should focus on feeling better. Don't mind me, okay?"

Shouta scoffs. "First off, it's not 'dumping.' Even with your giant mouth, I don't think you've ever emotionally dumped in your entire life. You're always so guarded."

Hizashi's head swivels over to him, incredulity clear. "What?"

"You say a lot without saying anything."

His lips twist oddly. The car shoots forward as the light turns green, Hizashi's foot heavy on the gas. "Oh, real rich coming from you. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black - "

"It's not a bad thing," Shouta cuts in quickly. "Or, if it is, it's not one I have any room to make a judgement on. I'm just saying, you wouldn't be dumping on me if you just told me what was going on with you."

"You're still recovering," Hizashi repeats stubbornly. "You need to heal."

Shouta scoffs louder. "This isn't even the worst I've been beat up, I'm fine."

" *Ex-fucking-cuse me* ?"

However heavy his foot was on the gas, it has nothing on the way he slams on the brakes and spins to face Shouta. He hisses as the seatbelt pushes against all of his sore parts, muttering, "You want me to recover but then do something like that. Mixed messages, Mic."

"When were you hurt worse?"

His voice is weird. Shouta's brow furrows.

"Uh. The whole thing at - " he stops himself abruptly. Neither of the times that he was thinking of - the USJ or a particularly brutal and bloody battle against the LOV - had happened yet. It had been automatic to brush off these injuries, as inconvenient as they may be, because he isn't nearly as sore as he was walking around school two days after having the shit beat out of him and getting his elbow disintegrated. If he wasn't drugged to the point of distraction, he would have been able to differentiate between his injuries then and now and recognize that this is the worst he's been beat up at his current age.

"At…?" he prompts tensely.

"Don't worry about it. I'm fine, obviously."

It's apparent at once that Shouta did not say the right thing.

Hizashi's face flushes red quickly enough that it rivals the stop sign

they had been approaching. His fists flex around the steering wheel before they release long enough to slam the car into park. He reaches over and grabs Shouta by his hair - ow - and tugs him in close until they're practically nose-to-nose.

"A fucking building fell on you," he hisses tightly. His breath is hot against Shouta's face and distracts him for a millisecond. "A building FELL on you. You're acting like it's no big deal that a building fell on you and you almost died, and now you're telling me that's because something else hurt you worse?"

Shouta rubs the back of his neck. "It sounds bad when you put it that way."

"That's because it IS bad!"

When there isn't a horrific war raging that doesn't have buildings falling only because most of them have already been reduced to rubble, he supposes it is.

"Sorry," he says lamely. His head ducks against his will, chin tucking against his chest as he avoids Hizashi's gaze. His hand is still wrapped in Shouta's hair, but he relaxes his trembling, white-knuckled grip enough that Shouta has space to look away from his piercing eyes.

"I don't - !" Hizashi groans. He leans forward until his forehead is pressing against the side of Shouta's head - it must be uncomfortable, leaning across the console like that - and he takes a long, deep breath. "I don't need an apology. What I need is for you to give a fuck about your health and tell me when you get hurt so I don't find out in moments like this."

It's hard to care about his health when there's so many other things that seem significantly more important. It's also why he doesn't bother with more than the basics of hygiene and grooming when he isn't undercover. He could spend twenty minutes on a shower and shave, or he could smell like stale sweat and research more or spend more time on patrol or help Izuku with his homework -

But those are sentiments that he knows would concern him if he heard any of them from his students.

His own thoughts of, "Yeah, I'm injured, but I'm still alive and I don't hurt so much that I can't move," are even worse when he knows it's something that Deku had, in more or less words, said on multiple occasions. Picking out a memory of Deku blowing off a trip to the

medics is easier than remembering what he had for breakfast yesterday.

Shouta sighs a little. He doesn't want to be the Deku to Hizashi's Aizawa. That would be not only *obscenely* weird but also incredibly unfair to him since they're meant to be peers. "Okay. I'll try."

Hizashi's grip loosens completely, and he pulls away. "Okay."

"I am sorry."

"Just - do you have any idea how scary it was to get that call? To get to the hospital and see Inko bawling because they wouldn't let her see Izuku for an hour?" his throat visibly tightens, and he chokes out, "To think that I might lose someone else to 'structural damage'?"

Oh .

Shouta's an idiot.

"I - "

"If that doctor hadn't been there, you would've died, and I would've had to live with the fact that both you and Oboro were killed and there was nothing that I could've done even if I had been there - !"

"Hizashi, no, hey," Shouta says quickly. Acting on the Midoriya instincts that Inko and Izuku have painstakingly ingrained in him through copious sob-fests and need for physical affection, he reaches over and tugs him into a hug. Hizashi latches onto him immediately, burying his face in Shouta's shoulder and soaking it in tears within seconds. "I'm here. It's okay."

"It almost wasn't!"

"I'm here," he repeats uselessly. He doesn't know how to soothe Hizashi, doesn't know how to handle his best friend breaking down when *this has never happened before* .

This has never happened before .

Not in school, not in the past timeline, and certainly not in this one.

Shouta rubs his back, strokes his hair, and tries to mimic the soothing noises Inko makes when he's freaked out in front of her. Hizashi's latched onto him with no desire to let go any time soon, so Shouta settles in and tries to keep his weight from falling on his still-injured

leg.

Hizashi isn't inscrutable the same way that Shouta is, but he *is* equally closed off. Where Shouta keeps people at arm's length, Hizashi welcomes people in with a grin that would never let on that there's a complex, calculating man behind the cheer.

Shouta is sarcastic and dry and witty in turns, he pushes and prods then backs off if anyone tries to come back at him, and he doesn't share his opinions when they aren't asked for.

Hizashi on the other hand, is so boisterous and friendly that people don't even realize that no one knows more than the bare minimum about him. If Izuku wears his heart on his sleeve, Hizashi keeps his on a shelf behind a translucent display case. Enough to know it's there, but the details are obscured and hard to make out. He'd rather talk about other people and help them than share anything about himself.

It's partially why he, Shouta, and Nemuri get along so well. They all keep their personal thoughts *personal* . In return, they respect when the other two do the same.

It's why it was so surprising to them to hear Nemuri's drunken ramblings about her issues as a hero. It's likely why Hizashi was so concerned when Shouta was the one to reach out and ask for them all to hang out.

But, Shouta realizes belatedly, Hizashi's sobbing is his own damn fault in more ways than one. He's gotten soft and much more emotional in his old age, and he's not as skilled at stiff-arming his loved ones' attempts at caring for him as he used to be.

He's the one who reached out to Hizashi in the first place and gave him space to be vulnerable and acknowledge his drinking problem. He's the one who encouraged Nemuri to be friends with Inko. He's the one that asked for them to hang out to discuss his problems with Izuku's father, he's the one that talked to Hizashi about his worries about heroes as a whole, he's the one who has brought sentimentality and *feelings* into what used to be a trustworthy but distant friendship.

It's his fault, but it's Deku's as well.

The Midoriyas too, but primarily that bastard who made 1-A feel like a bunch of rowdy siblings rather than classmates and subsequently made Shouta admit he had a heart. The warmth from that group of kids - even knowing that last time around it got more than a few of

them killed (which is a thought that's still enough to make him want to break down and cry with Hizashi, so he squashes that down as deep as he can), the sentiment and kindness and care are things that Shouta would have spent the rest of his life chasing after if he hadn't been forced into acting as a pseudo-soldier in a war none of them had ever prepared for.

What a mess.

"God, sorry," Hizashi says suddenly, trying to jerk out of Shouta's arms. Shouta locks them around him tighter, some part of him knowing that the embrace can't end just yet. "I wasn't even there for either of these and I'm a wreck, and you - I mean, you're the one who - "

"I'm fine," Shouta says honestly. "I know I should be more… Upset."

"Traumatized."

"Upset," Shouta repeats patiently. "But Izuku's fine. Sandbox kid's fine too, according to him and Inko. No one else was hurt, and I'm going to recover. I think it's a win overall."

Hizashi's hand has Shouta's shirt clenched in both fists, his face is still pressed into Shouta's shoulder, and Shouta finds he means it. Even while being slobbered over by his best friend, Shouta feels like he's won.

There's still danger out there - Inko and Izuku are in danger just by being associated with him - but he, strangely, feels optimistic about the future. It's a strange deviation from his normal pragmatic pessimism.

Hizashi doesn't look up as he asks, "Are you really okay? Even with nearly dying like Oboro did?"

"Don't sugarcoat it or anything."

"Didn't think you'd want me to."

Oboro is an old wound that was cauterized when he watched Kurogiri close a portal while Kirishima was falling through it. Over the years, he's had to grieve more meaningful losses than a briefly-cherished childhood friend. Of the deaths that haunt his nightmares, Oboro hasn't featured in any since he was a young teacher trying his damnedest to keep a bunch of fifteen-year-olds alive.

Maybe it's callous of him.

He thinks it's practical. Otherwise, he would've been catatonic with his depression long before he had the chance to travel some decades into the past. If he couldn't get past the first major loss of his life, he wouldn't be here.

He says, "I'm really okay. Are you?"

Hizashi doesn't answer for a long time. Shouta waits.

"I really want a drink."

Shouta rests his cheek on top of Hizashi's head. He ignores the embarrassment in Hizashi's quiet tone, the way his fists have clenched tighter, and he says, "I'm sure Izuku would be thrilled to share his apple juice with you if you agreed to sleepover tonight. I certainly won't say no to having someone to help me to the bathroom that isn't the size of a small teddy bear."

He snorts. Releases the tension in his hands and shoulders, and relaxes until most of his weight is being held up by Shouta. "Come on, Inko isn't that short."

"Who said I was talking about her? You think Izuku is going to let anyone else help me? He would've driven me home himself if his feet could reach the gas."

a homecoming is incomplete without takeout and at least some emotions

Chapter Summary

Everyone is fine. Finally.

Chapter Notes

hello all! took a bit of time for me to get this chapter out because i finally was like "okay muta you seriously need to decide where this is going because uh. this hospital arc was the last thing u really had completely fleshed out. where are we going from here babe" and it turns out i'm indecisive? who would've thought????

anyways, this means i have an outline! for the rest of the fic! so in theory, the end is in sight! (the outline is single-spaced bullet points that covers 3 entire pages we still got a long ways to go friends but like. at least i know what i want the end to look like??? i guess????) (okay also but it took me until now to realize that this is for sure a slow burn fic???? like. in my head i was like "haha they're gonna get together SO FAST" and i'm >90k words in and shouta still is an oblivious idiot and nemuri still thinks she's straight?????? @ myself how are we gonna do this bro....)

also i saw that i had a few comments asking about what i ended up naming my cat i had mentioned like. a dozen or so chapters ago - i did end up naming her bug! it seemed to fit her better than toshi, plus there are so many nicknames that go well with bug (bugaboo is my nickname of choice for her, and when she lays on my chest i call her cuddlebug, and when she's being a jerk i call her cockroach, and when she's being sweet and lovey she's lovebug, and when she screams (which is frequently) i liken her to a cicada but call her Bastard Menace)

to all of the people who started reading recently and left comments on every chapter: you deserve the world and i would give it to you were it within my power.

to all of the people who have been here since the beginning and whose names i see comment and go "omg my friend!!! who has been here for so long!!! they're still here!!!!": i can and would slay god in your name. just say the word babes

to all of my readers: thank you for your support and encouragement! thank you for reading! thank you for enjoying! i really hope you continue to enjoy this fic as it goes forward!!!

i think that's enough sappiness for now~ this note got long, so hopefully the chapter makes up for my rambling. have fun, stay safe, and if you can, take some time to be kind to yourself today!

Inko is more than happy to let Hizashi sleep on their couch and play nursemaid for Shouta.

“I was a little worried about helping him get around,” she admits over dinner. “He’s heavy, considering how scrawny he is.”

Shouta would argue with her, but he’s too busy shoveling actual food into his mouth rather than the terrible garbage the hospital tried to pass off as sustenance. Inko is too good to him, having ordered greasy takeout from the noodle shop a few blocks down so it would arrive just as he and Hizashi walked through the door. When he swallows, he considers defending himself, but then he remembers the glass of apple juice by his elbow, and that takes precedence.

Izuku, like the cute guard dog he is, comes to his defense. “Mr. ‘Zawa isn’t scrawny! He’s big and tall and one time I watched him break a plate with his hands!”

“That was an accident.”

“He needs to eat more than those jelly packs of his,” Inko insists. “Especially since he’s recovering. With how strong he is, he should be more bulky. Don’t you agree, Hizashi?”

Hizashi, on his fourth glass of juice, laughs. “You’re such a mom! Shouta, stop worrying your mother~”

“Ew,” Shouta says through a mouthful of chicken. A little bit of spittle drips out of his mouth onto the top of Izuku’s head, which has everyone but him squealing in disgust.

“Shouta!”

“Ew!” Izuku yells out delightedly, giggling and shaking his head all over.

“He knew the risks when he decided my lap was a better seat than an actual chair,” he says unapologetically. Not that he fought Izuku very

hard when he scrambled up onto his lap as soon as he sat down, but it was ultimately Izuku's decision to do so.

The last few days, he had been in physical therapy and they had been working on getting Izuku home, so he hasn't seen his tiny lean-green-talking-machine very much at all. Izuku recovered quicker than Shouta so his earlier return home was expected, but it was still difficult having his kid under a different roof. Moreso when he was undergoing agonizing exercises trying to get his body back up to speed after being so injured.

That also means, though, that Shouta hasn't seen Izuku since the doctors removed his bandages.

There's not anything too terrible. Izuku is still Izuku. Remarkably hardy and resilient, he doesn't seem to have any lasting difficulties.

However, he was scarred by whatever hit him in the face, resulting in a small, crescent-shaped scar under his right eye. It reminds Shouta of the scar he received from the USJ break-in so long ago. Izuku's scar is more jagged and a bit further away from his eye than Shouta's had been, so the deja-vu feeling isn't as strong as it could be.

There are a few other cuts and bruises that are in various stages of healing, but overall, Izuku seems to be recovering extremely well. It settles the wriggling worry that had been twining itself around his gut since he first woke up in the hospital.

Shouta's takeout container looks like it's been licked clean by a dog by the time he finishes. He scrubs a slightly greasy hand over Izuku's hair and asks, "You're feeling alright?"

Izuku cranes his neck backward to look at him. His eyes crinkle so his smile can stretch across his face. "Mm-hm! I don't feel sore at all anymore. And the nurses said that sandbox-kid would be waking up soon before I left and I asked them to give him my email so we could keep in touch so I could make sure he'd be alright and they said they would! I wrote it on the card I made for him too just to be safe but I hope he emails me because he seemed really nice."

"Sandbox-kid isn't awake yet?" Shouta's lips press together tightly. "Do we know why?"

Hizashi reaches over to pat his back in an attempt to provide comfort against the guilt he likely could smell a mile away. "We weren't able to find out too much since we're not related to the kid, but his nurse

was able to confirm that he was in a medically-induced coma and they didn't expect any complications. I think it was due to his quirk being a mental-based one, so they wanted to make sure his brain had enough time to rest and heal."

"Why would he need to be asleep for that?" Izuku asks. "Is there something about mental quirks that means being awake while your brain heals is a bad thing?"

"Ehhhhh…" Hizashi makes a wobbling gesture with his hand. "Research is skimpy on that. Leading theory is that since quirks like telepathy and telekinesis aren't tied to any organs or body parts except the brain, they'd rather stress the brain as little as possible when folks like that are injured. Especially if it's a head injury of some kind."

Izuku nibbles on the side of his thumbnail, nodding thoughtfully. "That makes sense. I wonder what his quirk was. I hope he'll be alright."

"He sounds like a trooper from what you were saying, so I'm sure he will be," Inko reassures him. Her dinner has barely been touched. She picks at it with her chopsticks but doesn't actually lift any of it to her mouth.

Shouta figures that she must have been stressing over the apartment and making sure everything was ready for his return, snacking on whatever was at hand. He makes a note that they'll have to restock their KitKat stash if they want to get through Shouta's recovery without her having a nervous breakdown.

Inko continues, more to Shouta and Hizashi than Izuku, "I wanted to talk to his parents, but they always seemed to be leaving when I was arriving or vice-versa so I never got a chance. I would've asked for them to let us know when he woke up."

"Guess we'll see."

"When do I go back to school?" Izuku asks suddenly. "I think I missed a math test - they'll let me make that up, right?"

"They'd better," Inko says. "If they don't, Shouta and I will go bug them until they do."

Izuku chomps at his thumbnail again. "They won't hold me back because of how much school I missed, will they?"

“Of course not,” Shouta says immediately. “You’re smart enough that you could have skipped a grade or two if they gave a damn about their students.”

“But Ms. Kojima said that if I missed her class she’d fail me and what if she gets the principal involved and what about my record and getting into high school and - “

“If any of those bigots try to fail you, I’ll make their lives so inconvenient that they’ll push you through to the next grade just to get me to shut up,” Inko promises. She stands up and lifts Izuku off of Shouta’s lap to trap him in a giant bear hug, squeezing until Izuku shrieks with laughter. “Don’t worry about school. Let us grown-ups handle the boring stuff, okay? You just have to make sure your big ol’ brain is healed up.”

Inko dances around the room with Izuku caught up in her arms, humming loudly to a random tune while Izuku giggles. Her dance is a bastardization of a waltz, but it seems like the dance is more of an excuse to distract Izuku and give him a chance to calm down from his school anxiety.

While this happens, Hizashi motions for Shouta to lean in closer. When Shouta’s close enough, he murmurs, “Would his teachers seriously fail him for being injured? Why haven’t you reported them?”

“Who would I report them to? The equally bigoted principal? The school board that is underfunded and more or less useless? The cops that are always ever-so-helpful?” he drawls sardonically. “Inko has tried all of those. She’s tried anything and everything that might make Izuku’s life less shitty, and the tentative truce of, ‘Leave the quirkless kid in your class alone and grade him fairly, and in turn we won’t kick up a fuss every time he inevitably comes home with injuries from other kids’ is the best deal she was able to get. I don’t have any more sway than she does, so the best I can do is glare at the little shitheads when I drop him off in the morning.”

Hizashi turns to look at Izuku and Inko. His face is solemn in a way it so rarely is. “That’s terrible.”

“You think that’s terrible? Look up ‘quirkless life expectancy’ and then come talk to me.” He leans back in his chair and closes his eyes, sighing softly. The lingering pain killers or full stomach has him sleepy, and he can feel his mind wandering closer and closer to a

doze. “Had nightmares for weeks about that one.”

“I don’t - “

The rest of his sentence is cut off by a loud, repetitive knocking at the door. In three seconds it goes from “obnoxious” to “I am thiiiiiiiiis close to breaking the door down,” and the lovely sound of two Bakugous’ snarling voices accompanies it.

“INKO MIDORIYA OPEN THE DAMN DOOR I CAN’T BELIEVE - “

“IZUKU OPEN THE DAMN DOOR YOU COWARD I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE - “

“THE HOSPITAL! THE HOSPITAL AND NOT EVEN A CALL WHAT THE FUCK - “

“I HAD TO SIT WITH TSUBASA AT LUNCH BECAUSE YOU WEREN’T THERE AND I BROKE HIS NOSE AND GOT DETENTION AND IT’S YOUR FAULT FOR BEING GONE - “

Inko places Izuku down carefully and walks over to the door, cool as a cucumber. Hizashi stares at the door like there’s rabid coyotes behind it - which is closer to the truth than it should be. Shouta is torn between amusement and irritation, knowing that every interaction with any Bakugou is hilarious and exhausting in equal amounts.

Izuku is nearly vibrating on his feet, shifting back and forth and trailing at Inko’s heels. The moment the door opens, he exclaims, “Kacchan! You came to see me!”

Bakugou’s face is red and he nearly punches Izuku in the face trying to knock on the door again. He yells, “DETENTION, IZUKU, AND IT’S YOUR FAULT SO YOU BETTER GO WITH ME - “ before cutting off suddenly. He stalks forward and grabs Izuku’s chin forcefully tugging him so they’re eye-to-eye. “What happened to your face? It’s uglier than usual.”

“It’s a scar! They think it was a brick, but it might’ve been rebar but they don’t think so - “

“You were at the hospital and didn’t tell me!” Mitsuki almost shrieks, poking at Inko’s chest and forcing her back into the apartment. “No phone call, no text - nothing! What the hell happened? Are you okay? Is Izuku okay? The fuck is wrong with you!”

“It’s so good to see you, Mitsuki,” Inko says brightly. “Come in, have a seat. You’ve met Shouta before, and this is Shouta’s friend Hizashi. We’ll tell you the whole story. Shut the door behind you.”

Bakugou still has a grip on Izuku’s chin and is staring at the scar on his face with squinted eyes. “Seriously, loser. Who beat you up?”

“A building!” Izuku says cheerily. “Mr. ‘Zawa and I were walking to school and we stopped at that park with the red swings and the matching sandbox and it’s in between that tree that looks like Sir Nighteye’s suit and there was a big explosion and bad guys everywhere and a building fell and Mr. ‘Zawa saved me and another kid who was in a sandbox but we all went to the hospital and the nurses gave me red jello when I asked for it and my dad sent me a book about heroes from decades ago that was so cool, it didn’t even have stuff on All Might in it! And - “

Oddly enough, Izuku’s ramblings seem to alarm Mitsuki and Bakugou. Shouta can’t imagine why.

(That was sarcastic even by his standards. Maybe he’s more tired than he thought he was.)

“We’ve had a busy few weeks, so I hope you can forgive me for not giving you a call. As Izuku said - a building fell on him and Shouta.” Inko gives Mitsuki a deadly sweet smile. “I’m sure you understand.”

Mitsuki ducks her head.

Rubs at her neck.

Glances at Inko, sees that same smile in place, and finally lets out a gusty sigh. “Okay, yeah, I was an ass to barge in like that. But you’d be worried too if you just heard that your friend had been hanging around the hospital for weeks and hadn’t said anything!”

Hizashi turns to look at Shouta and says pointedly, “Yeah, weirdly enough, I know how that feels. Nice to meet you. I’m sure we can share stories about our friends who don’t take care of themselves well enough.”

Shouta could continue to listen to that slander against his person, or he could watch the strange interaction between Izuku and Bakugou unfold. The second option is more interesting than listening to Inko tell the story he lived through.

He's not sure he's ever seen Bakugou's eyes so wide before. Or maybe they only seem huge because his face is so tiny. He's gotten used to seeing Izuku as a child and separating him from Deku, but tiny-Bakugou is still an odd novelty to him.

Bakugou finally lets go of Izuku's chin, but he steps forward until they're nose-to-nose. His eyes squint into not-quite-a-glare as he scrutinizes Izuku's face closely. "You were in the hospital?"

"It was really weird and cold but the nurses were nice and - "

"Can you just answer with a yes or no for once?!" he snaps. "You were in the hospital? Yes. Or. No."

Izuku visibly bites his tongue and swallows the word vomit he wants to spew. He says, "Yes."

"But you're okay now?" When Izuku opens his mouth, he quickly says, "One word!"

Izuku deflates. "Yes."

Tiny-Bakugou's eyes scan over him from head-to-toe, then back to his head, then land on the scar under Izuku's eye. His hands clench into tight, white-knuckled fists. "I'm walking you to school from now on. I'll blow up any buildings that try to fall on you since you can't walk anywhere without getting your stupid ass hurt."

Aw.

That was almost nice of him.

Izuku says, "Mr. 'Zawa walks me to school though."

"Do I look like I care?! I'm walking you to school and you're sitting next to me at lunch so I don't have to put up with Tsubasa and his shitty face."

"Tsubasa's face isn't THAT bad."

"Whatever! You're sitting with me! Shut up already, I can't stand you - "

"Kacchan, you gotta be nicer to people so when you're a hero they don't cry - "

"You're the only one that ever cries! No one else is a crybaby like you,

so shut up!”

What a familiar scene. If their voices weren’t so high-pitched, Shouta would think he was back in class 1-A and trying to stop Bakugou from beating Deku’s head in. It’s oddly comforting even with how loud everyone is being.

He leans over until his head is on Hizashi’s shoulder, mutters, “Sleeping now. Don’t move,” and goes limp before Hizashi can protest. He might not have protested at all if Shouta isn’t imagining the arm that drapes itself over him and helps him get comfortable, but he’s already groggy and can feel himself drifting off.

an apology is worth a thousand eyebrow raises

Chapter Summary

Tsukauchi is manipulative, but at least he's not a jerk about it this time.

Chapter Notes

hey all~! we're approaching the one-year anniversary of when i started writing this fic, and wow i think this is the longest i've devoted myself to a single fic. ngl i'm highkey surprised that i'm not losing steam on this because long-fics are generally where my ideas go to die. (please ignore the other unfinished fics in my profile that were abandoned… may they rest in peace… tmagr is my favorite kid i'm sorry i'm a terrible mother...)

I'm going to attribute the persistence to literally all of my readers being the sweetest people in the world - like one of you said that when this fic updates, your entire discord server talks about it and gets excited???? Wild. it's absolutely wild for me to think that my work and i are being perceived by people out of my sight. (also @ the person who commented that - tell everyone in your server that i said hi)

I also had a tiktok show up on my fyp that was??? Recommending my fic to people????? normally on tiktok for the memes and i got surprised by Kindness

additionally i think (think, hope, GOD please) that i finally have my medication situation mostly sorted out since i can now stay awake all day without needing a 3hr nap by noon to stay functional, so in theory i'll be posting more than once a month now. Can't guarantee it, but i'm gonna try~

As always: thank you so much for reading. Thank you for enjoying. I'm going to spend the rest of the night taking online quizzes to try to find out what mha character i'm most like b/c what else do people do when they don't want to think about work the next day

Shouta had been spoiled by years of Recovery Girl fixing him up. He thought that the chronic pain and injuries that slowed him down in

his later years were due to age and exhaustion, but it turns out that his younger body is just as slow at healing when he doesn't have someone with a damn-near-magic quirk saving him from near-death.

He always loves having an excuse to sleep more than his usual few-hours, so recovering from injuries is rarely anything other than an excuse to hibernate and complain until the pain dies down enough that he can get back to patrolling. He didn't have anyone fussing over him the first time around until he started working at U.A. Even then, if his coworkers or students tried to fuss, he was good at ignoring them.

He cannot ignore Izuku.

Izuku is eight and easily influenced.

Inko and Hizashi decided early on to take ruthless advantage of these facts.

This means that Shouta was stuck on the couch watching shitty movies with Izuku until Inko and Hizashi finally decided he could go back into the field. It took a week longer than Shouta would've taken on his own, but as he strolls towards the police station and marvels at how spry he feels without ten pounds of painkillers in his system, he'll admit that they gauged his readiness fairly well. Whether it's their combined mother-henning or some weird sixth sense that socially-gifted people have, they were able to tell when the soreness and random aches had let up and freed him from their clutches exactly twenty-four hours later.

He didn't have much time to get restless between entertaining Izuku when he wasn't in school and sleeping when he was. Inko went back to work right after he got back from the hospital, so sleeping during the day made the most sense since he'd be the only person in the apartment.

At night, Tsukauchi's admonishment (*"When you decide you give more of a damn about your loved ones than your pride - call me."*) went running through his head on repeat, and even though there's not much he would've been able to do if All for One had attacked, he kept his eyes open and his guard up while the Midoriyas slept.

Nothing happened. Shouta doesn't know what he's going to do when he gets back to his regular patrol and can't watch over them at night. He can, in fact, already feel himself getting stressed just thinking about it.

For at least the next week he'll be playing catch-up and can procrastinate his worry for a bit longer. Or, more realistically, he'll worry in the meantime and put off making a decision on what to do until he absolutely has to.

He's barely made it through the door before Sansa's yelling, "Oi, Tsukauchi - Eraser's in!"

"Why?" Shouta asks tiredly.

Sansa's whiskers twitch as he shrugs. "Apparently he's got an in with the higher-ups. Chief told us to do what he says from now on, and while I like you, I don't like you enough to risk my neck."

"I'm blocking your number on Inko's phone."

"I'm slightly inconveniencing you, and in return, you ruin my chances at love and happiness?" Sansa mimes taking a shot to the heart. "Cruel, man."

Tsukauchi opens the door and steps out from Chief Otsuka's office, hastily walking towards Shouta. He says, "Thanks, Sansa. Appreciate you letting me know."

"Fuck you, Sansa," Shouta says blandly. "Tsukauchi, always a pleasure."

The real pleasure is seeing Tsukauchi's eye twitch at him lying so blatantly. "Of course," he replies. "Walk with me, Eraserhead? I have some important matters to discuss with you, and it should be done in private."

"More important than - " he pauses, glances at Sansa's desk, and says, "A break-in at the 7-11? Is that really in this department's jurisdiction? There's not a 7-11 in any town near here."

Sansa pointedly tucks papers back into the file and shoves it into his desk drawer. "You know how it is. More and more stations are being replaced by the Commission and low-ranking heroes looking to climb the ranks. Means we're being stretched thinner and have to cover broader areas with more small-fry cases like this."

"Must suck," Shouta says unsympathetically. He doesn't think replacing cops with shitty heroes is a great move, but he also doesn't like cops. Seems like the general public loses regardless of what you call the bastards who stop them from petty crime, but it might be his

cynicism talking.

There's more than one reason why Shouta's an underground hero and not a policymaker.

"Eraserhead, please."

"Since you're begging so pathetically…" Shouta waves him on. Tsukauchi takes the lifeline and scurries off, and Shouta follows without another word.

The conference room is less of a mess than the last time Tsukauchi corralled him into it. Papers are inside of folders, there's no half-eaten meals or half-empty coffee cups, and the chairs are at a respectable distance apart from each other and clearly haven't been used for a quick nap anytime recently.

Shouta takes a seat. Tsukauchi closes the door behind him and then takes the other.

"I apologize for harassing you during your recovery," Tsukauchi says bluntly. "It was inappropriate. I was out of line. If you want to write me up, I would understand."

Shouta raises an eyebrow. "Huh. You mean that."

"I do," he confirms. "My behavior was unnecessary. No one was in immediate danger at the time and I should have waited until you were discharged at the very least."

He's not blank-faced, but he's also not visibly wracked with guilt. His apology is sincere enough.

Shouta really wishes Tsukauchi was less of a pain in his ass, because he *likes* this bastard. There's something to be said for someone who can own up to their fuck-ups without any fanfare. This is a guy he'd love to bitch about asshole heroes with, except he keeps trying to mess with Shouta's plans.

"It's fine," he says. "I know what it's like when you're close to a case. Was that all, or…?"

"No. I have more to say - and I'd appreciate it if you keep the comments to a minimum for once."

"I'll do my best."

Tsukauchi gives him a reproachful glare. Shouta replies with a shit-eating grin.

“I wanted to let you know that I pulled some strings to get this district added to the top heroes’ circuits. Chisaki’s benefactor is the type to stick to the shadows, so shining a spotlight over the neighborhood will be a good deterrent to any other blatant attacks.”

“How much influence do you actually have?”

“This means that heroes that are in the top ranks like All Might will be in the area more frequently,“ Tsukauchi barrels past Shouta’s comment, which - fair. “I am going to request that you bring at least one of them into the investigation if you catch any hint of something on the scale of Chisaki’s arrest. Not only will that direct some unsavory glances away from you, it’ll give you backup that’ll make sure you get back to that vicious wife of yours.”

“Inko’s not my wife,” he says automatically.

“I meant the loud blonde.”

He rolls his eyes. “Seriously?”

“I have a personal stake in making sure you don’t get yourself killed anytime soon because of said loud blonde. Present Mic more or less threatened to gut me if I didn’t get some plan in place for you and your family’s protection.”

Shouta repeats, “Seriously?” except this time it isn’t mocking at all.

Tsukauchi nods, lips twitching at the edges. “He’s the one who suggested adding the area to the higher ranks’ schedule, and he cited a, to quote my Hero Commission contact, ‘shit ton’ of research about the crime statistics in this neighborhood to back the addition up.”

He wonders what he ate earlier that’s giving him such acute heartburn all of a sudden. He scrubs at the spot over his chest lightly, humming thoughtfully under his breath. “Wonder how he had time for that.”

“It *is* rather surprising to have someone like Present Mic arguing so vociferously for a high-crime low-reward neighborhood instead of bugging other heroes to show up on his radio show. I think the sheer shock value of seeing an airhead like him bring in binders of information is what got the commission to agree.”

“Hey,” Shouta says sharply. He glares at Tsukauchi. “Don’t be rude. He’s a smart guy.”

The detective raises his hands in surrender. “I’m just saying what it looks like to outsiders.”

“Whatever.”

There’s more discussion about how this change will affect Eraserhead. His day-to-day schedule shouldn’t change much, but some of the cases that fell by the wayside while he was convalescing in the hospital will transition to someone with more bandwidth. Now that there will be more heroes around than him and a handful of newbies, regular meetings will be implemented so everyone with a hero license in the area will be kept up to date on policy changes and heroes will have an opportunity to request assistance as needed.

Tsukauchi has stepped in as the liaison between the police, the heroes, and the Commission. It means that he’ll be fielding most administrative tasks that the increased hero traffic will create as well as the delegation of ongoing cases.

The underlying meaning: Shouta will be seeing plenty more of Tsukauchi. And not only Tsukauchi, but a lot more daytime heroes that he only ever interacted with after he became a teacher the first time around.

Shouta doesn’t know how to feel about it all. He can’t wrap his head around how such a drastic change has taken place just because All for One *might* have something against him. To think that he had been worried about keeping Izuku and Inko safe while he’s on patrol, and now big names will be around to pick up the slack.

Not that he would trust All Might of the current time with anything more complicated than a pet rock, but it does bring him peace of mind that he didn’t have before walking into the station earlier. All for One won’t start walking the streets openly when there’s the possibility of camera crews catching a glimpse of him.

He has to remind himself that there’s only so much he can do until he figures out what All for One (and, by extension, Shigaraki) is up to at this point in time. Whatever Tsukauchi’s actions change moving forward, him being on All for One’s radar - while disconcerting - can only help with getting closer to the threats he has to take out.

Tsukauchi, thankfully, stops talking right around when Shouta starts

to get bored of the conversation and would rather have some time alone to figure out what this new development could mean for the future. He looks at Shouta closely, then says, “I want us to work together, Eraser. I know that you can help me, and I know that I can help you. What can I do to make that happen?”

“Why are you pushing so much?” Shouta retorts. “I’m difficult. There’s other ways to get the information that I have. You’d be better off tracking down other leads.”

“Because this man - this dangerous, terrible man - puts someone I care about at risk.” Shouta feels himself reel back at the uncharacteristic, blunt honesty. The vulnerability that Tsukauchi is showing rankles, throwing off the rapport they’ve developed so far. “The person I care about is someone who has devoted their life to helping others. They’ve given their health, their life - their soul, if that isn’t too dramatic to say - to making the world safer. If this man is back, Ya - *they’ll* get themselves killed trying to stop his plans from coming to fruition.”

The intensity floors Shouta.

Tsukauchi says, earnestly, “Eraser, if I can save them for once - if I can keep them safe. Or at least make sure they have all of the information available so they have a chance of making it out alive - if I can do that, you have to understand that I’d do anything to give them that.”

He knew that Tsukauchi and Yagi had been allies, that Tsukauchi had been Yagi’s main form of contact with lower-level law enforcement, but he hadn’t known that there was this much sentiment between them.

This isn’t hero worship or the admiration of a valued coworker. This isn’t esteem or respect or even something as vague as care.

At least on Tsukauchi’s end, this is love.

Whether Yagi has ever been capable of loving anything other than his perceived duty to the world or his sense of responsibility, Shouta couldn’t say, but Tsukauchi’s devotion reveals itself in the way his eyes squint with concern, the way his hands are clenched underneath the table, the way he looks at Shouta and implores him to *understand* .

Shouta’s mouth is dry. “I do.”

“You’ve made it clear that I have to prove myself if you’re going to

work with me. I hope that my actions today have been a step in that direction." Tsukauchi gathers up a few of his folders, stands up, and nods his head in Shouta's direction. "Give me a chance, and I won't let you down. You have my number."

With that, he leaves the conference room and the door shuts closed with a soft click.

Shouta pulls out his phone and starts writing out a text.

'What the hell did you say to tsukauchi? Talk about a 180.'

'Why did you do this for me i had it covered i'm fine'

'You're a sappy idiot and i'm a maudlin old bastard but i don't need your meddling '

'How the hell am i supposed to take this why are you like this'

'You should spend your time worrying about someone who needs your nosiness i'm fine'

'Thank you for protecting someone who's becoming a sister and the boy who's everything good in the world but please tell me you did it for them and not for me because i'm FINE i don't need this i don't des'

He finally settles on, ' *guess i'll be seeing u around the neighborhood more often. lunch is on me.'*

Hizashi answers almost immediately. *'♡ \ (￣▽￣) / ♡ takoyaki plzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz \(★ω★)/'*

'I'll get you whatever you want'

'Anything.'

'How are you so bright i don't know how to be enough for someone so bright'

'I'm going to keep you safe this time'

'Whatever you want just tell me and i'll make it happen'

'w/e - pick up some ginger ale and meet me at north park @ 1'

'(b ^▽^)b'

plenty of sunshine to go around

Chapter Summary

Shouta runs some errands and comes across a cute blonde.

Chapter Notes

hello all!!! happy birthday to me and presentation michael - he def won't like this chapter but it's Necessary for end game. i am sorry to post it on his bday tho that's mean of me but unfortunately this story has a mind of its own by this point. hizashi has good moments in upcoming chapters though so he'll recover i'm sure

god i can't believe some of you have been keeping up with this fic for a whole year. i can't believe that i've been posting this for a year and people somehow keep finding this and coming along for the journey. i can't believe 2021 is halfway over holy fuck... i'm running out of time to have a hot girl summer :/

okay for real though i hope you all enjoy this chapter - it's setting up for a scene that i've had in mind since i started writing this fic. we have a glimpse of baby bakugou as a lil treat~

thank you x 100000 for reading, commenting, and giving kudos - it means a lot that this fic has received the love it has when it's been a huge passion project for me. <3

hope everyone is enjoying their summer if you're in the hemisphere for it! i'm sweating all the time and already got sunburned despite only being outside like twice!!!! i hate it!!!!! where's my anime beach episode!!!!! (the answer is: i do not live near a beach therefore if i wanted to go to a beach i would need to Plan to do so and why would i do that when i can instead just complain) (checkmate boomer)

Izuku nearly has a conniption the first time they pass Fat Gum on their way to school. Katsuki - because Shouta's had too many conversations with all of the Bakugous and gotten too used to seeing a tiny Katsuki Bakugou instead of the equally-loud-but-much-taller Bakugou he was used to - plays it cooler, but his eyes are shining as Fat Gum helps a woman in a wheelchair onto a curb.

To no local's surprise, the streets aren't exactly made for accessibility. Not when this neighborhood has been underfunded for the better part of the last two decades.

The woman smiles brightly at Fat Gum and thanks him, and they talk for a few moments. Izuku is mumbling about his quirk under his breath, and while Katsuki crosses his arms and tries to look annoyed, he's eagerly taking in what Izuku's saying and nodding to encourage the quirk babbling.

Shouta, behind the two of them, nudges Izuku pointedly. "It won't be the last time you see him. We have to get you to school now. Move it."

"But Mr. 'Zawa it's FAT GUM and he - "

"School. You need good grades to be a hero."

"I got a perfect score on our last math test," Katsuki boasts loudly, puffing out his chest. "Good doesn't cover it! I'll have the best grades!"

Izuku says, "Yeah! Kacchan's the smartest!"

Shouta says, "Neither of you will be very smart if you start cutting class. Get those tiny legs moving, shrimps."

Somehow, he herds the two to school without learning anything about Fat Gum he didn't know previously. Whether that's a testament to how much practice he's had with being a child shepherd or Fat Gum being a (in this time) relatively new hero who Izuku hasn't had enough time to research…

Regardless, the kids arrive at school with a few minutes to spare. Shouta says, "See you later," Izuku waves, and Katsuki drags Izuku off without acknowledging Shouta.

The new usual.

The part of Shouta that remembers Bakugou as a strong, capable young man finds amusement in the way Katsuki clearly dotes on Izuku in his own way. He treats Izuku half of the time like a little brother he only tolerates because he has to and the other half of the time he treats him like a treasured, delicate teacup. It's hilarious and adorable, and Izuku doesn't seem bothered by the hot-and-cold treatment.

The part of Shouta that has been taking care of Izuku wants to wring his scrawny little neck for his obnoxious ego making things so damn difficult and still fucking up Izuku's self-esteem further.

Izuku is happy, he reminds himself. Izuku is absolutely overjoyed at the fact that his beloved Kacchan is giving him the time of day again, and just the other day he came barreling out of school with words of praise and adoration for the way Katsuki saved him from a bully that was going to trip him on the way to lunch. Katsuki had puffed up proudly the way he always does when Izuku pays him a compliment, no matter how ostentatious and saccharine Izuku's sincerity may be.

Coincidentally, Inko now is less stressed about sending Izuku to school. Having a(n admittedly tiny) bodyguard that has made it his mission to protect Izuku makes Shouta feel slightly better too. Katsuki Bakugou, fierce and loud and admired despite his shitty attitude, is decent enough protection against school bullies.

Even if his obnoxious insecurity and obvious disdain for Shouta grates on his nerves.

Maybe one of the therapists that refused to take Izuku on as a client would be willing to work with a kid that has a strong quirk. Just because they're selfish bastards that won't help someone they deem a lost-cause doesn't mean they wouldn't be useful to someone they would be willing to spend time on.

A thought to hold onto, but irrelevant currently. With the kids off at school, Shouta has plans for the day.

1. Errands - They need groceries, and the bathroom sink has been leaking. Inko insists she can fix it herself without having to call maintenance if Shouta picks up a wrench that is appropriately sized for their pipes. Shouta is skeptical but wouldn't be surprised if Inko had secretly been a competent plumber all along.
2. Stop by the police station to get the month's schedule of hero patrols - Tsukauchi only requested that he work with them if he had leads on the Chisaki-All for One case, but Shouta wouldn't hate pawning off some of the more boring stakeouts he has planned for the upcoming months.
3. Bother Nemuri since she's been oddly quiet since he and Izuku left the hospital - She shouldn't be on patrol until Friday, so unless she suddenly decided to become a morning person, she'll still be at her apartment by the time he wants lunch. If he's

lucky (or pushy) enough, she'll make him something to eat and can also vouch to Inko that he does eat when she's not looking.
4. Nap.
5. Pick up Izuku from school - Katsuki stays late for some club or friend group or whatever small children do. Even with his friend back, Izuku doesn't have any desire to stay at school longer than he has to, so he and Shouta still have the walk home to themselves.

Shouta isn't an optimistic guy, but he thinks today is going to be a good day. The weather isn't horrendous. He'll likely get a free meal and time for a nap. He gets some time with Izuku and might start bumping their training schedule up to three days a week instead of the current two. Inko might fix the bathroom sink.

He's content.

Contentment is still a novel concept after years of horror, so he basks in it until the awkwardness of standing in the middle of the sidewalk outweighs his peace. At that point, he stretches his arms above his head and makes his way to the grocery store.

They don't need much more than some dish soap, the wrench that Inko wants, and rice. He picks up some other non-perishables that never hurt to have on hand and some tylenol for his own medkit that's starting to run low now that he has patrols again. All together, his purchases fit into two bags that wouldn't even be too heavy for Izuku to lift on his own.

Why Fat Gum comes barreling out of nowhere with a wide grin and a, "Let me give you a hand, sir!" is, therefore, a complete mystery.

Shouta stares at him and holds up his sparse bags. "Think I got it. Thanks though."

Fat Gum snatches both bags out of Shouta's hands, his smile still stretched wide across his face. "I insist! Please, lead the way."

"Not very heroic to give help where it's not wanted," Shouta notes placidly. He wonders what Tsukauchi said to FatGum that has caused this strange encounter. After a slight pause, he starts walking anyway.

Sue him. Contentment might be nice, but he's terrible at not indulging his curiosity.

"It's Mr. Aizawa, right?"

“That’s me.”

“Great!”

He keeps pace with Shouta’s steps. They walk a block - then two - in silence. Plenty of random people wave excitedly at Fat Gum, and just as many spin around to walk in the opposite direction of him. There’s rarely any really dangerous crime in the area, but there’s plenty of pickpockets and pot dealers that would do best to stay off of any heroes’ radar as much as possible.

Soon, Fat Gum - still a green hero, still young, only a year or two younger (or older? He can’t remember) than Shouta’s current age - bursts out with, “I heard you’re the guy who took care of the Chisaki mess and that we got moved to patrolling here because someone’s after you. Is there anything I can do to help? Make you feel more safe?”

“Just keep doing what you always do,” he responds. “Tsukauchi talked you into taking this position, right?”

“Yessir,” he says, which is kind of hilarious considering they’re peers and it’s not like Shouta’s anything except a freelancer. He has no authority over this guy. “Detective Tsukauchi has been the one coordinating this. He seems to think there’s some big-baddie that’s lurking around, so we’re all on high-alert.”

Shouta pities Fat Gum. He clearly thinks this is going to be some sort of glamorous buddy-cop movie instead of possibly months of mindless patrols and catching petty thieves.

“Any chance you know who else is going to be in the area? I’d like to know who’s on my turf.” He pauses, then adds, “And avoid the police station. I hate that place.”

Fat Gum laughs like he made some kind of joke. Shouta did not.

“I think it’s just about everyone! The detective has All Might on his side, so once he was advocating for protecting an at-risk district, we all were signing up before he finished his speech. I nearly got decked by Endeavor trying to sign up before him.”

“Even Endeavor’s getting dragged into this, huh?” he murmurs. “Interesting.”

“Between you and me, Endeavor seems pissed that All Might thought

of it first. Taking more patrols in less populated, underfunded districts means that you might be the only daylight hero those folks ever see in person. He thinks that whatever 'big bad' Tsukauchi keeps alluding to is just another run-of-the-mill villain and this is all a publicity stunt."

"I'd believe it," Shouta agrees. "Daylight, spotlight. What's the difference?"

Fat Gum laughs again. Again, Shouta wasn't joking. (Or, at least, not entirely.)

"I'm not much for the upper-level drama. Whatever we do, wherever they want us to be, I'm just glad to be helping folks."

Shouta's ilps twitch. "I'm not a reporter. You don't have to sell me your pitch."

"I'm just saying! If you need anything while I'm in town - "

"I won't."

"But if you do," he persists. "I'll make myself available."

Shouta sighs loudly. "Fine, fine."

Apparently placated, his smile stretches across his face once more. His round body straightens as much as it can and he beams out at the world in front of him like existence itself is a gift to be treasured. "Great! Now, I'm starving - Can I tempt you into joining me for a bite to eat?"

"No."

Fat Gum clutches at his heart dramatically. "Harsh! I'll leave you to your business then."

"Give me my damn groceries."

Fat Gum merrily goes on his way after returning Shouta's bags. Shouta wonders why he seems to attract over-the-top, sunshine-y heroes even more this time around. Before, he had his hands plenty full with Mic and Midnight being in his personal life. Now, even Fat Gum - a hero he respects since he has (or will have) plenty of experience in different areas of hero work and has never placed his publicity before the well-being of anyone else, but a hero he had never met until years down the line - seems to be flinging himself into Shouta's orbit.

Next in line will be All Might, knowing his luck. That might be enough for him to call it quits and retire to the countryside.

The exasperation with sunshine-bright personalities isn't enough to keep him from making his way to Nemuri's place. The walk is enough for him to determine that Fat Gum's friendliness - though off putting - was nothing more than him trying to network with the local hero population. He might not put much stake into popularity, but he knows the value of having allies where possible.

No reason for Shouta's stomach to have any lingering butterflies.

(Sue him. Fat Gum's cute. Shouta has a thing for cute.)

(Shut up.)

hey siri is it gay to sigh when you think about how soft her lips were

Chapter Summary

In a wild turn of events, Nemuri and Shouta have feelings *and* talk about them.

Chapter Notes

hello readers! how are we doing today my fellow cool kids

thank you for the birthday wishes!!! i was the pikachu shocked meme every time there was one in the comments b/c i would be a dumbass who went "how'd they know it was my birthday" and then immediately have to remind myself that i willingly provided that information

i have never claimed to be a smart woman. regardless: thank you!!! i also loved the love for fatgum. i think he's such a cute character and i just. want to squish him. SO BAD. i was excited to introduce him and everyone's responses to him as a love rival had me on the FLOOR you all are hysterical

in other news - is there any appetite for a discord server for this fic? i honestly just miss being in discord servers that are active and it'd be nice to chat with folks who are in the fandom who i know have the same taste in fics as me since uh. presumably you're reading this fic b/c you like aizawa and dadzawa and aizawa being a dad. i'd like to speak with people more but i tend to get overwhelmed with 1-1 chats and responding to them then feel bad when i don't respond and therefore never respond b/c i feel bad. the neverending cycle of Pain.... a discord server is a way less stressful medium for me to chat through tbh and requires less mental effort on my end lmao

i'll give it until i post the next chapter to gauge interest, and if it seems like people want it, i'll get it set up and include the link in ch42. i won't be offended if there's no interest so don't feel like you gotta hype me up on this, but i figured i'd toss the idea out there since i think it'd be fun (◕▽◕)

once again: thank you all for being on this journey with me, thank you for the support and kindness, thank you for

commenting, thank you for kudos, thank you for reading ~ ngl i did in fact cry when i saw this fic had passed 15k kudos and 300k hits. i've been telling literally all of my friends who barely know what fanfic is about these milestones getting hit and had the friendship equivalent of "are ya winnin son" support from them which was very pure to experience ngl

hope everyone is well, stay safe, stock up on cool looking masks if ur in the US since everyone's whispering about another lockdown, and uh. idk find the softest blanket you have because you deserve soft things and that's the best self-care i can think of. i got a blanket as a bday gift from a friend and it's probs my favorite item i own now so i've just been touching it and hugging it constantly and i think that joy is something everyone should experience

Fat Gum's cheeky smile sticks with him, so when he arrives at Nemuri's place, he knocks a little more forcefully than he intended to. When there's no immediate answer, he knocks even louder.

He pauses and gives her a chance to answer. Then he knocks furiously and continues until the door is flung open.

Instead of the expected exasperation, Nemuri looks at him the way a starving man would look at a restaurant trash can full of discarded leftovers. Shouta knows what that kind of desperation looks like, as he has been that man a few more times than he's comfortable admitting even in the privacy of his own head.

Nemuri's hair is piled into a messy bun, she's in sweats and an oversized t-shirt, her glasses are slightly askew, and overall, she looks incredibly frazzled. Shouta doesn't even have a chance to question any of it, because she grabs him by his collar and yanks him into her place.

The living room is a battlefield. Papers are scattered across the floor, the TV is blaring some movie that must be from decades ago given its poor quality, takeout containers in various states of "half-empty, half-full, potentially molding," are piled up behind her couch, and the couch itself is missing a cushion or two.

Shouta raises an eyebrow at Nemuri, who is still looking at him with that fervent, unhinged expression. "So…"

That's the only opening she needs. She grabs his groceries from him and flings them off to the side, shoves him at the couch onto one of

the remaining seat cushions, then plants herself on the other. She clasps her hands together and confidently says, “I’m not gay.”

“Okay…?”

“But you are.”

“Are you going to keep saying stupid things, or are you going to tell me why you look like you’re on the tailend of a bender?”

“Shouta, look, okay - I’m not gay. I know that. I know I’m not, I’ve slept with guys before! And according to - “ she blindly grasps at the floor and grabs a handful of papers, skims them quickly, and continues, “Cosmopolitan, a research study from some American university, and forums online, it’s normal to be straight and still wonder what it’s like to be with someone of the same-sex. It’s normal!”

“It might be normal, but you’re not. Get to the point, Nem.”

She continues like he hadn’t said anything. “Sure, sleeping with guys isn’t like. Anything mind blowing. But I doubt sleeping with women would be any better! They don’t even - and I mean, what would be the point?”

“Sexual pleasure. Presumably.”

“Right! And if I don’t even get that from some of the guys I’ve been with, that doesn’t mean anything about MY sexuality, it just means they’re shitty in bed!”

The logic doesn’t make sense to Shouta, but he’s well-aware that Nemuri isn’t looking for rationality at the moment. “That’s a definitive possibility. Men aren’t generally known for their prowess in pleasing women.”

“Exactly! And if sometimes I wonder what it would be like to be with a woman, that doesn’t mean anything! I’m still straight!”

“Sure,” Shouta says placidly. “So why are you freaking out?”

“I’m not freaking out!”

He looks over her apartment pointedly. Makes a show of squinting at the leaning-tower-of-leftovers.

“Okay, maybe a little,” she admits, slumping against the couch. “But

wouldn't you be defensive if someone kept trying to tell you that you were straight when you're not?"

"I don't particularly care what other people think of me, so. No."

"Pretend you're a normal person then."

"Has someone been trying to convince you that you're gay? What sparked all of - " he waves at the room around him. "This?"

She freezes. The papers in her hand crinkle as her hand's grip tightens. "Uh."

"Something either at or shortly after our hospital trip," he muses. He leans back and crosses his arms thoughtfully, looking at her as her face slowly turns red. "Something that has you avoiding the Midoriyas."

"Uh. It's not a big deal!" She tosses the papers over her shoulder, laughing loudly. "Never mind! So, anyway, what brings you over to - ?"

"Are you going to tell me or am I going to have to get Hizashi to bug you?"

Nemuri winces. "Ugh, no. He'd be insufferable."

"So."

"Look, it's really not a big deal," she insists. Her eyes don't quite meet his, and her smile is stiff. "As we were leaving the hospital with Izuku, Inko. Um. She thanked me for supporting her while you and Izuku were unconscious. And she kissed my cheek."

Shouta raises an eyebrow. Her smile grows tenser. "She gave you a kiss on the cheek. And now you're doing research into, 'is it normal to have gay thoughts about women if you're not gay'?"

"I told you it wasn't a big deal!"

"Except it clearly is, if it caused you to destroy your living room like this."

She opens her mouth, then closes it. Her lips press together tightly.

Shouta cocks his head to the side. Interested despite himself - because this is a side of Nemuri he's never seen before, never in his old life or

this new one, and it's oddly delightful to watch. She's always the one teasing him, so he thinks he's earned the right to give her some shit. "So. Inko kissed you."

"On the cheek!" she corrects loudly. "It barely counts, right? Friends do that kinda thing all the time. It's definitely not a big deal."

"Mmhm. So. How did you feel when Inko kissed you?"

Midnight, the 18+ hero, blushes.

Like a tomato.

Even the tips of her ears, barely visible from the rat's nest on her head, are bright red.

Shouta says, "Yeah, see, I wouldn't look like that if someone asked me the same question about Inko. You sure you're not a little gay?"

She covers her face with her hands. "For fuck's sake, shut up! I'm just - it's just because - I can feel you judging me! It's making me self-conscious!"

"Talking about a kiss - a kiss without tongue, even - is making you, the 18+ hero, self-conscious."

Nemuri doesn't look up from her hands. She just nods, shoulders hiked up near her ears.

Shouta will be the first to admit that he doesn't know a damn thing about romance. He never had the time to date once he became a teacher. The closest thing he had to a love life was a random mission where he had to go to a concert for intel and a random civilian decided to try to dance with him. She proceeded to beg him for his number after he started arresting people.

Not exactly what shoujo mangas are made of, right? That kind of love wasn't a priority for him.

It still isn't, really. He's more than content with the family he's built.

All this time, he had thought that Nemuri was the same. Prioritizing work and saving people isn't an uncommon way of life for heroes. He could see her happy with the right guy, but he had expected both of them to grow old and cause chaos at whatever hero-themed retirement home they'd get shuttled into whenever the commission

grew tired of their senility.That seemed much more like the two of them than either of them actively searching out a romantic partner.

Her red face, tense muscles, and towers of research after a simple kiss indicate that Shouta had, once again, misread one of his closest friends.

Even if he never acted on them, at least Shouta has almost always known what his preferences are. It seems like Nemuri never gave her own a thought until Inko inadvertently forced her to.

“You know,” he says. He keeps his tone calm and his face as bland as possible. “It’s okay if the 18+ hero is flustered. It’s even okay if she’s thinking about things that don’t fit entirely into her hero persona.”

“Don’t be an ass.”

“I’m serious. You don’t always have to be cool, over-the-top, sexy-and-knows-it Midnight.” He reaches over and pokes her thigh until she puts her hands down and looks at him exasperatedly. “Inko kissing you is a new thing. Maybe it means something, maybe it doesn’t. Either way, it’s new and it’s okay to be unsure. You don’t have to figure it all out today. You don’t have to be the confident mature-rated hero all the time.”

Nemuri hesitantly places her hand on top of his and tangles their fingers together, squeezing lightly. “When did you get so mature? Shouldn’t you have been threatening to leave ten minutes ago when emotions started happening?”

“You don’t live with two human fire hydrants without learning how to handle a few feelings. Embarrassment is one of them.”

She chuckles a little, then lets out a long exhaled breath. “You’re right though. I don’t need to have this all figured out today. I’m just freaking myself out at this point. It’s like when you’re staring at a crossword puzzle and can’t think of the answer until you step away from it, right?”

Shouta blandly says, “Yeah, take a breather. I’ll be here whenever you want to talk more about gay thoughts.”

That makes her snort, which was his goal. She squeezes his hand again before letting go and standing up, stretching her arms high above her head. “Since you’re here around lunch, I’m assuming you want me to feed you.”

“I wouldn’t be opposed. Emotions are exhausting.”

“Hardy-har-har. I’m onto you, Aizawa. I know you both have AND understand emotions, which means you can’t blow me off when I have them anymore.” She sticks her tongue out at him through a shit-eating grin.

It’s just teasing, but Shouta’s heart clenches guiltily.

He thinks about the look he and Hizashi exchanged months ago when she and Inko were drunk, the way she looked when she said how tired she was of being groped - he thinks about the fact that she never said anything like that to him the last time around. Nemuri always played her cards close to her ample chest, but it hurts to realize that habit might have occurred through necessity rather than preference. If she had friends who weren’t so self-involved, she might have trusted them and told them what her plan was rather than going off on a suicidal mission that ended in Shigaraki clutching her face until she was nothing but ash.

By the time he can breathe past the shame (the lingering horror, the sadness, the fear that nothing he does will change what’s going to happen), Nemuri’s already in the kitchen pulling crap out of her fridge to feed her ungrateful, stupid friend.

“I’m sorry.”

“Huh?” she asks, cabbage and pepper in each hand. She spins to face Shouta, kicks the fridge shut, and says, “What for?”

“I’m sorry that I blew you off in the past if you got emotional. And that I made you think you couldn’t come to me if you had a problem. That’s not the kind of friend I want to be.”

Nemuri’s brow furrows. “Hey, it’s not like I’m much better. Don’t give me that sad look. That’s how we are, isn’t it? I tease you, you blow me off, we make fun of Hizashi, and sometimes we give each other a shoulder to cry on.”

“It shouldn’t be ‘sometimes.’ I want you to be able to rely on me even for stuff like - “ he waves a hand around at the papers and mess. “Like whatever this thing with Inko might be.”

She crosses her arms and leans her hip against the counter, giving him an inscrutable look. “You don’t have to feel bad or anything, since we’re pretty even on that front. It’s not like you thought you could

rely on me either." At Shouta's questioning look, she adds, "You didn't come to me when you were literally homeless."

He had reasons for that. Of all of the reasons, though, he knows that his choice to live on the streets came down to one thing.

Out loud for the first time, he admits, "That was just me being prideful. I was stubborn. I didn't want to rely on *anyone* . That's on me, not you."

"It's not like I made myself available. I never wanted to rely on you or Hizashi either, so I would poke and prod at your issues until you clammed up." She shrugs with a helpless grin. "You're my best friend, but we aren't really open with each other, are we? We're both closed-off in our own way and enable each other to keep being that way."

"It makes us sound really emotionally stunted when you put it that way."

She stares at him until he meets her eyes head-on. "Shouta, I didn't know that you were gay until a few months ago. That's pretty bad."

Shouta retorts, "Well, it's pretty bad that I never thought about how fucked up it is that you became an 'explicit-rated' hero right out of high school. So." He shrugs. "I guess you're right. We're pretty evenly awful."

Nemuri's inscrutable gaze remains for a lingering moment, then she bursts into laughter, cackling like a hyena and clutching her vegetables to her chest. "We're the worst, aren't we?"

"We really are." As she turns around back to the kitchen, he adds, "You're worse though."

"Fuck you," she calls back. "At least I'm pretty."

"I've been assured by Izuku that I am 'cool and really handsome,' so. Checkmate."

"Can't argue with that. Can you believe that we're all slowly centering our lives around that kid?" She shakes her head and drops the vegetables onto the counter, reaching for a cutting board in the same motion. "I was patrolling the other day and saw a dog that made me think of him."

Shouta leans back against the arm of the couch and shuts his eyes for

a moment. “Hm. Every time I see broccoli, I think of Izuku.”

“You do not.”

“I do. It’s the hair.” Her back is to him, so he can clearly see the way her shoulders shake with repressed laughter. “Can’t help it. I’ve been avoiding eating it because it makes me feel bad.”

The dam breaks, and she’s laughing again. There’s the sound of a pan or pot hitting the floor, a loud CLANG resonating and making him jump. He groans loudly and complains, “Aren’t you supposed to be cooking? Stop laughing at our emotional ineptitude and feed me.”

trusting somebody with your life is significantly less meaningful than trusting somebody with your loved one's life

Chapter Summary

Shouta is ill-prepared for his new work partner.

Chapter Notes

hello again! it's been a bit - hope everyone had a good summer~ i for one nearly cried when i saw the weather today was under 70 degrees, and i am wearing a sweater rn, so summer can gtfo whenever it's ready!!!!

part of the reason it's been a bit: i got a new job!!!! woo!!! i start in a few weeks so we'll see how it goes, but i'm really excited. it's been time for me to stretch my wings and do other work for awhile now, and it seems like the stars aligned perfectly for once.

additionally!!! after the overwhelming response last chapter, i did indeed spend 3hrs figuring out how to make a discord bot do my bidding. aka: if you want to hangout, feel free to join at the following link: h ttps:/ / discord.gg/zqvE8UgysC (if the link's weird, invite code is: zqvE8UgysC) I kept the rules simple, hopefully most things are self-explanatory, and i look forward to talking to everyone! okay so i had made a discord server and then after a few months of extraneous issues i forgot my account password and never went back to figure it out so ix-nay on discord lmao

thank you everyone for reading, thank you for enjoying, and i hope you like this chapter as much as i enjoyed writing it! <3

Shouta had no idea how annoying All Might and Endeavor's (one-sided) rivalry was until Tsukauchi's patrolling schedule became their latest battleground.

After weeks of shuffling shifts around and pointless meetings, everyone knows when they should be patrolling and where in regards to this new initiative. As all bureaucratic nonsense does, it took a long time to cut the red tape and get through the annoying crap. The main reason it took so long was thanks to All Might and Endeavor's

agencies arguing over the “best” time slots for their respective heroes to represent their agency in the different neighborhoods that are being targeted for Tsukauchi’s initiative.

Every agency has their own way of calculating the risks and benefits of assigning a hero to an area at a certain time. They look at potential for property damage, predicted type and frequency of crime to take place, likelihood of bystanders arriving and providing free exposure and reporting without excessive casualties, and a bunch of other variables that determine the optimal benefit while minimizing the risk of getting stuck with a ridiculous bill due to damage and civilian harm.

There’s actually a lucrative career field for the analytics that take place behind the scenes that determine the best day and time to send a hero to a certain prefecture. Similar to the way tech companies battle to recruit the most talented programmers, hero agencies try to lure data scientists and analytic experts through fancy benefits and high pay.

The general and management tracks at U.A. aren’t as well-known as the hero and support paths, but Shouta has been an advisor for plenty of elite students that were being headhunted by agencies for various reasons. Statistics, analytics, data management, physical therapy, research, public health - as hero agencies grow larger and expand their reach, schools have fought to keep up with the demand for a broad range of specialty professions.

U.A., with its elite reputation, is no different. Nedzu had worked hard to secure funding for a massive data center for their technically-inclined students to take advantage of and use to further their individual education. The hero students never have time outside of their intense physical training to have much of a specialized education, but the other tracks personalize students’ schedules when their potential is recognized, giving them the best opportunity to hone their skills that may not be fostered well in a traditional learning environment.

Shouta has always had an in or two with the big agencies thanks to this approach. He’s not a genius the way some of those kids are/will be, but he had fallback plans if he hadn’t been able to advance to the hero track. Data analytics is something he knows enough about to be considered knowledgeable but not enough to be anything special, so Nedzu had frequently sent non-hero-track students to him for tutoring if none of the gen-ed teachers were available.

Shouta might be an ass, but he's a decent enough teacher in one-on-one sessions like those tutoring opportunities were. His students always seemed happy enough to see him after graduating, and none of them ever denied his requests for assistance in his own cases if he reached out to them.

This is all to say: he knows that there were far too many arguments between Endeavor Agency and Might Tower over minute details that really won't make that much of a difference in practice. Most predictions are just that - predictions. Unless Sir Nighteye is involved, there are no guarantees that All Might will have more opportunities to show off on Tuesday at noon as opposed to Wednesday at two. And if Nighteye was wasting his quirk on crap like this, he wouldn't have made it as far as he has.

If the rivalry had ended there, Shouta would have enjoyed the mental exercise of imagining what those analysts were placing bets on while being annoyed by the pettiness of it all - but he would have gotten over it quickly and gone about his usual activities.

Obviously, Shouta has never been given a break at any point in his life, and this situation isn't any different.

"I can't schedule them together," Tsukauchi says. He has dark bags underneath his eyes that rival Shouta's, and his signature trench coat is nowhere to be found. His office at the precinct is mostly stark and undecorated, but his desk is covered in papers and empty coffee cups. It's clear he's made himself at home, but home has never been anything other than a place to refuel and sleep. It makes Shouta exhausted just to look at him, and he's suddenly glad that he decided to slump into the available chair off to the side of the detective's workspace. "All Might would work with anyone and make the best of it, but Endeavor is…"

"An ass?"

"Yes, but I was going to say, 'dangerously competitive.'"

Shouta tries not to immediately think of Bakugou and fails. "Sounds annoying. But also sounds like it's not my problem."

"If you want there to be a neighborhood to keep patrolling, it's your problem," he says bluntly. "Endeavor shouldn't even be involved in an area that's as densely populated as this one, not with his quirk being what it is. He's better suited for cities that are less likely to go up in flames if even one tree catches on fire."

“Izuku said that according to the fan forums he frequents, Endeavor causes an unreasonable amount of property damage. It sounds like you agree.”

Tsukauchi snorts. “Unreasonable might be a bit of a stretch, but the Commission does a good job of explaining away casualties and damage by blaming the villains. Endeavor is good at what he does and I don’t think he would harm a civilian on purpose, but he knows that the Commission will back him since he’s a household name. It makes him less careful than he should be, if you ask me.”

“Huh,” Shouta says. “So, he’s an ass. Again, why is this my problem? All Might can handle him, can’t he?”

“Endeavor is competitive and views All Might as his rival. If it meant getting more credit or recognition that he did something better than All Might, he would do it in a heartbeat, screw the aftermath.”

“So you’re saying that Endeavor could cause some serious damage because he tries to goad All Might into a dick measuring contest every time they’re in the same room, and when All Might doesn’t go for that because he’s got the whole ‘truth, justice, and blindingly bright grin’ thing going on for him, Endeavor gets even more reckless and careless, so people might die.”

Tsukauchi taps his nose lightly, lips curled into a dry grin.

Shouta leans his head back and groans. “Isn’t there another spotlight hero that can patrol with him? Why me? We’re not exactly in the same league.”

“Two reasons. The first: I have to separate Endeavor and All Might, and the only people going solo right now are you and Fat Gum. One of you has to go with All Might, and Present Mic would kill me if I schedule you with someone like Endeavor after he went to so much trouble to protect you.”

“Why does Hizashi have a say in my assignment? He’s not my mother.”

Tsukauchi’s voice is condescending and pitying, which Shouta thinks is uncalled for. “You really have to ask? Use your head, Eraser.”

Shouta does not use his head, because it’d be a waste of time. He already knows that Hizashi is annoyingly persistent when he wants something, so he can’t blame Tsukauchi for taking the path of least

resistance. “Alright, whatever. What’s the second reason?”

Without hesitation, Tsukauchi says, “Because I trust you.” Shouta’s head snaps back up, and that wry grin on Tsukauchi’s face has transformed into a softer smile.

“What does trusting me have to do with it? Sounds like you’re trying to butter me up.”

“Maybe a bit,” Tsukauchi admits freely. “I still want to gain your trust, you know. I know you’re holding back. And, for All Might’s sake, I think you’re the best choice.”

“Why? He’s going to miss out on day patrols if he partners with me, which isn’t exactly great for his image.” It doesn’t fit with the mental schema of agency time-hoarding that Shouta has. Tsukauchi, as All Might’s friend and unofficial contact, should be pushing for All Might to work for pretty much any time other than midnight to six in the morning when the majority of civilians are asleep and not watching the streets for a glimpse of glamorous, popular heroes.

Even the most devoted fans have to sleep. Hero chasers tend to weigh the risks and benefits when running after their idol of choice, and the benefits of wandering around the city at two-AM generally aren’t very tantalizing.

Plus - Shouta doesn’t want to work with All Might. There aren’t many people who get under his skin the way Yagi does, and without years of looming death hanging in front of him, All Might *must* be unbearable to be around. It makes his skin itch to think that he’ll have to play nice with that smiling show dog while keeping all of his secrets from spilling out.

Tsukauchi gives him a shrewd glance, then replies the same way that most people would read off a grocery list. “You’re not blinded by hero worship the way a lot of the younger heroes are, you don’t resent him for being more popular than you the way most older heroes do, and, honestly, I think he’d benefit from being around someone as practical as you are. I also know you’re competent enough to watch his back and smart enough to know that as skilled as he is, he’s still a man and he needs someone who can watch his back and carry their own weight just as much as anyone else.”

Ah.

Yagi must be losing time already.

If Tsukauchi is concerned enough that he wants someone that he knows won't go to the press if All Might suddenly starts coughing blood, then his decline must already have started. It'll be a long while until Yagi can't do hero work at all, but they must be shifting his patrols around and slowly getting other heroes to take over the busier areas and days.

Suddenly, Tsukauchi's initiative in agreeing to coordinate the heroes around Aldera has another layer to it.

He must have told All Might that taking shifts in the area was the best way for them to get intel on All for One - meanwhile, Tsukauchi is slowly shifting him away from the public eye. All Might wouldn't agree to decrease his time working at this point, after all, so Tsukauchi's making the best of the situation.

Keep him out of the public eye, make sure that no one will take advantage of his illness, get the other heroes used to picking up the slack, and maybe Toshinori Yagi will live to retirement.

Shouta's impressed. He says, "You're kind of self-serving, aren't you? Partnering us together just so your boyfriend doesn't get any splinters?"

It's a joke, and not even a particularly witty one, so Shouta doesn't expect any response other than Tsukauchi handing him the file with his new schedule and an exasperated sigh.

That is not the response he gets.

Tsukauchi's face turns red in one breath, and the second breath has him squeaking, "Pardon?" in an octave that not even Inko's voice could reach.

Shouta stares. Tsukauchi, somehow, gets redder.

"We're not - I mean. No. I don't know what you're implying, but don't spread rumors - "

"Is he really your boyfriend?" Shouta asks, perturbed. "Your taste is kinda shit if so."

"He's not!" he insists, arms making an "X" and his head shaking fervently. "I don't know where you got the impression, but please - All Might is essentially my employer, and he's a close friend only."

He squints suspiciously. Tsukauchi stares at him earnestly. He narrows his eyes further and slowly says, “Okay. If you say so. But you *did* say that you trust me, so I won’t say anything if - ”

“I do say so!” he replies quickly. “There’s nothing going on, I can assure you. The tabloids have one thing correct, and that’s the fact that he’s never had a relationship of that kind. All Might isn’t interested in anything like that.”

Shouta looks at Tsukauchi’s red face, then looks away and mumbles, “Kinda sounds like you are, though.”

Tsukauchi stands up suddenly and all but flings a stapled packet of papers at Shouta. As Shouta is trying not to get a papercut, Tsukauchi starts shoving him towards the door and babbles out something like, “ThankyouEraserheadI’llseeyoulaterdon’tbelateforyournextpatrolgoodBYE.”

The door slams shut.

Shouta says, “Rude.”

Ignoring the officer on duty who’s barely awake, he wanders over to the break room that always has some lukewarm coffee available. The coffee maker is probably older than him and the coffee grinds catching up quickly, but it’s plentiful and free which is the best he can ask for on short notice.

There’s an awkward gap of time between now and when he has to pick up Izuku from school. It’s not worth it to go for a walk, nor is it worth it to look over his ongoing cases, nor is it worth it to go get coffee that doesn’t suck.

A disposable cup and reluctant pour later, he’s seated with a not-cold-but-not-really-warm-either cup of mostly coffee grinds. Decades ago, he would’ve been able to chug this without flinching and gone back for seconds, but these days, he’s been spoiled by Inko’s French press and Hizashi’s fancy coffee spots.

Hizashi.

He’s been weird. Not in a concerning way, but in a, “you were hospitalized and I’ll scream if you break any bones anytime soon,” kind of way that is both familiar and unfamiliar. He remembers after the USJ, being covered in bandages and narrating the sports festival with Hizashi mother-henning him in between announcements, so him being concerned about Shouta’s well-being isn’t new.

What's new is the *way* he's being concerned. It's not the usual performative, over-the-top concern that Shouta's used to, because most of the care has happened outside of his line of sight.

Hizashi's talks with Tsukauchi to get all of - this, the patrols, the new hero division in Aldera, all of it - together are the biggest oddity, but he's also been hanging around more frequently. They already grab coffee at least once a week, where Hizashi has recently refused to let Shouta pay for their drinks, and he shows up at the Midoriyas' apartment almost every other day, even if it's just to stop in and say hi.

Their text chain has doubled in only a few weeks, too.

Because he doesn't have anything else to do until he goes to pick up Izuku, he tugs his phone out of his pocket and scrolls through their conversation idly.

'ok so hypothetically if u were gonna pick a favorite shape what would it be'

'square'

'shooooooooo y aren't u asleep ~(((ʘ > ▵ < ʘ)o that could wait til 2morw!'

'ur the one who texted me…'

'b/c i have stuff 2 do wuts ur xcuse i know ur not workin'

'Can't sleep.'

'oh no y not????'

'idk'

'do u wanna call and talk if ur bored looking @ ur screen & typing is just gonna keep u awake longer'

'Thought u said u have things to do'

'^ω^'

The next day, Hizashi texted him right before his patrol.

'hey ik u no wat ur doin but b careful k? heard that fatgum had probs earlier w/some1 & they got away'

‘K thx for the headsup’

‘srsly!!!! Be careful!!!!!!’

‘K’

‘shoutaaaaaa T口T promise!!!!’

‘fine i promise’

‘that didnt sound sincere (￣ε￣)’

‘what do u want from me’

‘pinky promise~?’

‘(-人-) 人 (´∀ `)’

‘SHOUTA THAT WAS SO CUTE WTF’

‘shut up’

‘never i’m screenshotting it (◕▽◕)’

In another time, Shouta might have found the constant attention smothering and demeaning, his pride refusing to accept that others might care for him out of anything other than pity.

Today, he’s scrolling with a small smile, because he’s a sucker for cute things.

And, despite his volume and general boisterousness, Hizashi has always been disgustingly adorable. He knows that Nemuri gets annoyed with the way his texts are nearly incomprehensible with shortened words and emoticons, and more than once, Shouta has had to interpret a text for Izuku when Hizashi was trying to be encouraging.

Shouta thinks it’s cute that he puts so much time into picking emoticons out that he feels the need to rush through typing his actual message. It’s fitting for him.

He’s still scrolling almost twenty minutes later and looking for any indication of what caused Hizashi to cling so tightly when he feels eyes on the back of his neck.

He’s experienced enough to tell the difference between a hostile stare

and a friendly gaze, so he doesn't rush to turn around or immediately go on the defensive. He stretches, puts his phone away, and turns around to see his best friend sauntering in, waving excitedly like they hadn't just seen each other that morning for coffee.

It doesn't surprise him. Or - maybe it does, because his heart skips a beat and he swallows reflexively.

A declaration of "Shouta!" is accompanied by a hundred-watt smile with teeth that are whiter than pearls and an energy normally found only in chihuahuas and kids mid-sugar rush.

"Why are you here?"

Hizashi slides into the chair next to him without further adieu as if that question was an invitation and not a rebuke. Shouta considers telling him to leave, but Hizashi's already babbling about why he's at the police station, what he ate for lunch, what he's thinking about for dinner, how one of his interns broke a pair of headphones and cried so hard they flooded the studio so his show's canceled for the night so he's thinking about asking Inko if he and Izuku can have a sleepover and of course Shouta's invited too -

He's not acting like anyone but Hizashi, but it's weird. Just *slightly* off.

The babble is normal and goes in one ear and out the other, but the closeness - the way he's leaning in and smiling with his arm wrapped around Shouta's shoulder and *lingering* - that's not.

That's new.

The shirt that is open enough that Shouta can see his entire chest and the hair that trails down to his obnoxious belt buckle, the silver studs and jewelry and chains that he usually only wore with his hero suit, his hair loose and windswept, the smell of leather and smoke and -

Shouta, a little flustered and a lot confused, abruptly asks, "Are you stalking me?"

Hizashi throws his head back and laughs but doesn't deny it, which says a lot more than words could.

"You're shameless."

His grin widens. He leans in and coos, "If I'm shameless, what does

that make you~? It's not like you're mad about it, Shou-ta."

Shouta shoves his face back with one hand and scoffs. It's a quieter noise than he wanted it to be, but he's distracted by that chest and how hot his face feels and that damn smell. "I have to go pick up Izuku. Stop being weird."

"I'll come with!" he chirps, jumping up and stretching his arms high. "I have something to do over that way anyway."

"Of course you do."

Everything from there is a blur of rambling and elbows nudging and leather until Izuku arrives, cheering at the sight of his two favorite heroes. Between Izuku's excitement and pride over his recent test scores, Shouta barely notices that Hizashi excuses himself and walks towards the school rather than away from it.

He feels like he was hit by a truck. His heart's hammering like it, at least.

the ol' razzle dazzle except there's no razzle or dazzle

Chapter Summary

The Number 1 Hero could be replaced with a cardboard cutout and no one would be able to tell the difference. This is only half of the reason why Shouta breaks down for the nth time.

Chapter Notes

well it sure has been awhile! i hope everyone's been doing alright and hanging in there. i'm hanging on by a thread but you know i think that still counts!!!

many things kept me away for so long, including but not limited to:

- new job that actually requires me to. thinK???? horrible. we hate it. (that's a lie my job is perfectly fine but it does require a lot more mental bandwidth than my old one) (so much imposter syndrome guys it's unquantifiable)
- going on and shortly thereafter off of a medication that took away literally every emotion I've ever felt and actually considering suing my psychiatrist for malpractice (i didn't but not because i didn't want to)
- grandparent had a stroke and was in and out of different facilities for months
- 3 relatives (including aforementioned grandparent) dying within a week and a half of each other, which while sad was also lowkey hilariously terrible. like the universe really went "we're not gonna waste anyone's time, let's get this shit over with all at once" and my family just had to roll with it i guess???
- more medication changes because happy-brain-juice-machine broke
- honestly just straight up exhaustion like wow i didn't realize how much happened in the last 6-ish months until i started typing it out lmao

so! that is to say: if you tried to contact me at any point in the last 7 months, i was at no point in a headspace where i could even think about answering. i ended up deleting discord off of my

phone and belatedly realized that i did not in fact keep the password or email that i used for it and therefore can't log back in soooooo. rip.

MORE IMPORTANTLY: thank you all for your patience, thank you for continuing to read and kudos and comment in my absence, thank you for being so kind in said comments, and thank you for still giving this story a chance even with my updates being sporadic and choatic! i am rewarding you with angst.

this chapter was actually written before i went on hiatus, and i debated literally this entire time i was gone if this is the direction i wanted to take this story in. i changed it like 4x and went down just as may different rabbit holes and eventually went "eh screw it" and decided this was as good of a direction as any. so! we got all might in this chapter, we have complicated aizawa feelings about all might & yagi toshinori here, we got angst, we got ~trauma~ - i know that's what you all come here for.

thank you again for continuing to read and join me on this journey, and i hope you enjoy!

Shouta has more things to worry about than Hizashi acting a little off. He'd actually *prefer to* pick apart Hizashi and analyze his behavior until he comes up with a reason that makes sense, but there's a bigger problem at hand.

Patrolling with All Might.

He didn't bother to argue with Tsukauchi as much as he could have, and it's biting him in the ass now. Tsukauchi clearly has an ulterior motive other than wanting to protect his not-boyfriend, and Shouta would let Izuku eat his scarf if the motive was anything other than, "I didn't succeed in prying all that you know about All for One from you, and while you say that you don't give a damn about All Might, everyone gets at least a little dazzled so maybe he'll have better luck than me," stubbornness.

Shouta Aizawa has never been "dazzled," least of all by the oversized golden retriever named All Might.

He thought that it wouldn't be any more difficult to see All Might than it is to catch glimpses of other fallen friends and acquaintances, and he was both right and wrong. This All Might isn't the Toshinori that was his ally - the Toshinori that had worked his ass off to become a mentor rather than a symbol, the Toshinori who had a twisted sense

of humor once he realized that retired heroes don't have any obligation to only talk about kid-friendly topics, the Toshinori that had somehow managed to push forward and keep helping even after the boy he loved as a son was killed in front of him.

That Toshinori is nowhere to be found. In his place, there's a vapid celebrity that doesn't know how to connect with anyone on a personal level.

He's not flinching at the sight of him, but there is a hot emotion bubbling through his diaphragm every time All Might's booming footsteps approach him.

At least the "with" part of patrolling with him is less than he thought. They have their own areas and pretty much only have to check in with each other occasionally to make sure neither of them got themselves killed. It would've been difficult for the two of them to work together, considering their incompatible fighting styles.

It's still too much "with," in Shouta's opinion.

"Nice one!" All Might, younger and somehow more obnoxious than Shouta remembered, calls out cheerily. He has a scrawny, unconscious woman held under one arm and a shiny suitcase under the other. Shouta's fist aches slightly from where he clocked the case's owner - thankfully it only took one good hit for the man to go down, because Shouta's eyes are burning and his quirk wasn't going to last much longer. "Eraserhead, you are a credit to the profession. Your fighting prowess is - "

"Are you gonna carry this guy too? Not all of us have super strength."

A boisterous laugh that's loud enough to rattle windows - if the neighborhood didn't know that there were heroes on patrol that night, they sure do now. He says, "Of course, of course. It'd be my pleasure!"

Shouta has spent two weeks in similar situations. All Might laughing. All Might praising him. All Might giving shining smiles to everyone except the worst criminals - and even then, his glare wouldn't be enough to make a baby cry. All Might slapping his back and smiling, smiling, smiling - it's enough to drive a man mad.

All Might was annoying when he started teaching at U.A. and he was annoying up until he retired, but he wasn't this fake. His enthusiasm was exaggerated, but it wasn't so… empty.

This is a man who barely exists.

Shouta can't see any trace of Toshinori Yagi, a man who he respected and occasionally enjoyed the company of. There's nothing but this shell of toxic optimism, a facade of a facade that doesn't carry a facsimile of genuine warmth.

It makes Shouta sick.

It means that after weeks of uncomfortable, downright torturous patrols, Shouta's patience is at its end, and he can't stop himself from snapping, "Jesus, give it a rest, will you? Isn't that exhausting?" At All Might's bewildered look, he waves a hand at All Might and points at no part of him in particular. "The cheer, the fake-positivity, the spotlight-smile - it's sickening."

Startled, All Might takes a step back.Then his face softens, and he looks at Shouta like he's a recalcitrant toddler who is throwing a tantrum because he missed his nap. Shouta has and will throw tantrums for less, but that doesn't mean he wants All Might, of all people, to indulge him. Voice gentle, he asks, "Is everything alright, Eraserhead? Have I offended you somehow? You have my most sincere apologies if I have."

"Your existence offends me," he says bluntly. There's an odd fire in his gut, staring at this not-man who has nothing of worth, no real warmth behind those dead eyes. This isn't his friend, this isn't even his colleague - This hero is a caricature that makes him sick. "Is there any part of you that hasn't been politely packaged up for public consumption? The empty compliments, the vapid comments, all of it - do you have any opinions of your own? Do you have *anything* of your own?"

Muscular, blonde, freakishly tall, and slowly dying underneath it all, All Might the greatest hero, reels back.

For just a beat too long, silence lingers between them. Then, All Might clears his face of anything other than polite courtesy and gives an awkward chuckle. "I'm afraid I don't understand where this is coming from."

It's notably less boisterous, but it's still not Toshinori.

It isn't his friend. And Shouta despises him for not being the Toshinori that he once relied on.

With a sneer that hopefully looks as disgusted and disdainful as he feels, he scoffs. “Yeah, of course you don’t understand. You haven’t talked to anyone and treated them like an equal in at least a decade.” He doesn’t look at All Might, doesn’t let his eyes drift over, and instead pulls out his phone for a distraction.

A few texts from Inko are plenty, and he starts tapping out a response immediately. Somehow, time has passed to the point that it’s almost Izuku’s birthday again, and he’s on early-morning gift-wrapping duty.

How horrifying to realize that he’s been in the past for over a year and he still has no clue what the hell he’s doing, no clue where things are going or what he should be doing. It keeps him up more nights than not, but it’s easier to swallow when he thinks about how this year, Izuku is *excited* for his birthday.

If he’s accomplished nothing else - if he were to die by Shigaraki’s hand tomorrow - at the very least, he’s changed things for Izuku. He’s given him a much broader support system, a smidge more confidence, and the ability to kick enemies where it hurts.

Izuku’s birthday will be a good celebration of those changes, and Shouta will make sure it’s a birthday to remember.

This all is to say - Shouta would rather be home than anywhere near All Might on just about any given day, but tonight, he has even more motivation than usual to haul ass back home. He plops his phone back into his pocket, rolls his neck around to crack it, and starts plotting his route home.

“If you’re done pretending like you’re anything more than the breathing equivalent of a soulless motivational poster, I have places to be.”

“Eraserhead - “

“I’m assuming you don’t want my help taking those to the station, so I’ll be doing literally anything else.”

He reels his capture weapon in and readies himself to fling himself in the direction of home. Dawn is right around the corner, the sky ever-so-slightly lighter than the pitch-black that he’s comfortable working under, and he wants nothing more than to drown the anger and frustration and thick, clogging grief with an entire carafe of Inko’s coffee.

A large hand clasps his shoulder from behind and Shouta feels his body flinch and shirk away without his permission. All Might doesn't let go - looks like he placed the woman somewhere further in the alley, against the wall next to the man Shouta knocked out and still within easy reach - but he loosens his grip.

Shouta can feel his face distort, but hell if he knows what it looks like currently. His eyes feel dry, his heart's thumping, and he knows that he hates this stupid, foolish man.

"Detective Tsukauchi informed me that you were standoffish. I believe he used the word, 'prickly,' even." His voice is no longer jovial. "I should say that he warned me, actually. It's not easy to rattle someone as experienced as Naomasa, so I should have better prepared myself for your barbs."

"Get to the point," he hisses through gritted teeth. All Might lightly urges him to turn around, so he spins on his heel and glares him down.

All Might meets his eyes calmly.

"You don't like me," he says plainly. "I can't say I know why - I have plenty of heroes that resent me for one reason or another, and I'm afraid that if I kept track of every individual that has a grudge against me, I'd have no time left to do my job. So I don't need to know your reasons - especially since you still continue to work well with me despite your distaste. I admire your professionalism and abilities.

"What I do need to know is how you became entangled with the criminal underbelly - not just that, but why you've become a target and why you don't seem to be receptive to implementing any protective measures. Naomasa believes there's a lot that you're not telling him, and I'm inclined to believe him."

"It's - "

"If you cooperate," he interrupts quickly. "I'll remove myself from your patrols and you won't have to deal with me any longer."

Shouta might break his own jaw with how tightly he's clenching his teeth together. "I don't even know what you two want from me anymore. Nothing I know is valuable enough for you to keep hounding me."

"I don't need Naomasa's quirk to know that's not true."

“Look, unlike you, I have a life and I’d like to get back to it, so if you - “

“And I’ll let you, once you tell me what you know about All for One.”

Shouta stiffens. He knows it’s a mistake, can see the way All Might’s eyes gain an edge and turn knowing, and he would hit himself in the face if he was alone for being such a rookie, but he hadn’t expected him to name-drop when he and Tsukauchi have been dancing around the truth of the matter for almost a full year at this point.

It’s petty, but he still says, “Who?” because damn if he’s going to make this easy on him.

He doesn’t bite. “A very dangerous man who seems to want something from you. I’m sure you know who he is. Eraserhead, we want to keep you safe, and it will be much easier if you cooperate.”

“I don’t know anything all that valuable,” Shouta repeats. “I know who he is. I know he was a big name in the underground until a few years ago. I suspect he’s the one who was helping Chisaki’s operation, giving him financial support and hiding his experiments from the Shie Hassaikai. I suspect that he’s the one who wanted him conducting those experiments. I suspect that developing Trigger was a front for their actual goals. And I suspect because of those items and the obstacle that I present, that he’s the one who tried to crush me with a building. Tsukauchi knows all of this already.”

All Might presses, “Yes, but All for One was believed dead - has been believed to be dead for years, now. How did you even learn of his existence, let alone know he was alive?”

You , he wants to scream. *You, almost a decade in the future, told all of us too late and nearly got yourself killed and still tried to shoulder the burden alone, and that’s why I’m here now trying to clean up YOUR fucking mess -*

“A club. I already told Tsukauchi about it.”

“You told Tsukauchi that you learned about the Shie Hassaikai at the Beehive,” All Might corrects him. “I find it hard to believe that you learned about the Shie Hassaikai, Overhaul, *and* All for One at the same place when other sources have yet to track down any similar leads at the same place.”

He starts to turn away, shaking his head. “I’m done.”

“You must know how much of a threat this man is, Eraserhead. He’s painted a target on your back and all we want is to keep you and your family safe. Whatever he’s planning - whatever you’re holding so close to your chest… It’s too much for one person to handle - too much for you - “

Something in Shouta *snaps* .

“Is it?” Shouta violently turns back and stalks towards him, poking a finger at him harshly. “Is it really? That’s fucking rich, coming from you!”

The bubbling rage that has been simmering in the pit of his stomach is boiling over and spilling out, acidic and hot, and he can’t stop himself from snarling, “I wouldn’t have to be doing any of this if you weren’t such a fucking hypocrite! Too much for one person? No, you mean to say it’s too much for anyone EXCEPT All Might, because All Might knows best! All Might’s the strongest, the best, the only hero that can be trusted, the only one who can know all of these deep dark secrets that could get people killed and destroy everything - Too much for anyone to handle except the fucking paragon of peace who’s lured every fucking loser into believing that they can sit around with their thumbs up their asses while watching the world burn on TV because Lord and Savior All Might will keep them safe! Except that’s going to get people killed and it’s going to get children killed and you won’t be able to do anything, no one will be able to do anything because it’ll be too late too fucking late and if I had known - if I h-had known, if anyone had, maybe it would’ve - maybe - ”

“Eraserhead, you need to calm down.” All Might’s face is blurry when Shouta tries to focus on him, and it occurs to him that his chest is heaving and his ears are ringing. “You’re going to start hyperventilating if you don’t breathe.”

“Fuck off,” he chokes out. He stumbles back, hand clutching at his chest and eyes stinging. “This should’ve been you, you fuck, I s-shouldn’t be the one here, I shouldn’t - you would’ve already fixed everything if it was you but it’s not and you didn’t TELL me you didn’t tell me anything so I’m stuck and I’m fucking it up and it should be you not me!“

“Can I call someone for you? Someone who will be more of a comfort than I would be?”

Shouta shoves past him. He doesn’t realize he’s running until his

shoulder throbs from slamming it against All Might to get through, the alleyway suffocating and tight when all he wants to do is scream at All Might until Toshinori apologizes for dying and abandoning him and leaving him with too many questions and too much responsibility.

For a long time, he doesn't think. There are flashes of clarity, but for the most part, he's lost in fury and fear and grief that feels like a tsunami he can't escape from. He runs and flings himself around the city and somehow doesn't run into anyone even though the sun has finished rising and people are starting to wake up to start their days.

His chest hurts.

When he can think again, the sun is higher in the sky, his phone is ringing against his hip, and he's laying on the same bench he first sat on when he made the jump to the past. He's sweaty and clammy, his throat is raw, he must have bitten his tongue because all he can taste is iron, his hands are shaking, and he wishes he was home.

Shakily, he pulls out his phone and answers without looking.

"Shouta!"

Can you come get me -

I'm scared that I can't do this and one of you will get hurt -

If the number one pro couldn't make it, what chance do I have?

All Might is such a dick, he's such a dick Hizashi and I can't believe I miss the version of that oaf that I never got to say goodbye to when this hollow shell is what he used to be-

"Hey," he croaks. "I missed coffee, didn't I? Sorry."

"Yeesh, you alright there? You sound like you were gargling glass."

"Rough night. Rain check?"

Hizashi doesn't say anything for a few seconds. "Don't worry about it. Do you need anything? I don't have to be at work until noon. If you're sick - "

"I'm fine. I'll talk to you later."

"Shouta, if something's wrong - "

“Bye.”

gotta stock up on tissues when you got T-Issues (the cool, fun way to say trust issues)

Chapter Summary

Shouta asks an eight-year-old a question and receives an answer that, shockingly, doesn't solve his decades-old emotional turmoil.

Chapter Notes

hey all! despite the world's best intentions, i'm still here, i'm still kicking, and i still write every once in a blue moon~

thank you for all the well wishes after my author's note at the beginning of last chapter! def didn't realize how rough things had been in the first half of this year until i re-read that note before writing THIS note... not that this second half is off to a great start, but it def hasn't been as bad as it had been, and i'm hanging in there!!!

i'm so glad that everyone's reaction last chapter was "damn shouta's needed that breakdown for awhile, huh?" because honestly. if that ain't a mood. but now this chapter is the "comfort" of "hurt/comfort" so!!!! it took awhile but here's the post-angst happy <3

it honestly amazes me how much love this fic has received and continues to receive even as i take ages to post anything and am also terrible at communicating if i'm alive or dead or continuing this fic or not - it means a lot to me and i'm endlessly grateful to everyone who picks this story up and gives it a shot. when i have a rough day, a lot of times i'll pull up this fic and read the comment section or just look at how many collections it's been included in, and it makes me feel at least a little bit better. (and if you knew me IRL, you'd know how difficult it is for me to feel better on a rough day and how monumental that is)

so, as always: thank you for commenting, thank you for the kudos, thank you for bookmarking, thank you for reading at all or even just checking this story out briefly <3

(ALSO a few people in the comments have asked about my cat bug and how she's doing - the answer is that she's a MENACE and i adore her with all my heart. my older cat, dea, tolerates her and

sometimes even licks her forehead before trying to gouge out her eyes, and bug likes to scream at me while i work. we have a good system here.

bug also plays fetch but ONLY with her bee-on-a-string toy that is a hazard to throw but god if she doesn't love it so yes i've nearly broken many things in my apartment throwing the damn thing but NEARLY ONLY COUNTS IN HORSESHOES AND TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES.)

Somehow, he gets home.

Shouta doesn't remember how. He doesn't know if he passed out or if his brain had too much of everything and made the executive decision to disconnect his consciousness, but when he feels more human - exhausted and achey, but human rather than the personification of panic and trauma - he's curled up on the couch with his yellow blanket tucked around him, head lying on one of the decorative throw pillows that Inko swaps out every month. Right now, they're a navy blue with yellow stars, the fabric scratchy and uncomfortable now that he's cognizant enough to notice.

The TV is playing something quietly. He thinks it might be a documentary about lions, but his sight is blurry and the light makes his head ache so he doesn't look at it for too long. He glances down and sees that Izuku is on the floor in front of him, huddled over a puzzle with other toys scattered around in various stages of use. He's talking to himself under his breath, mumbling even quieter than usual.

For a moment, he wants to start crying all over again. That won't help his headache, though, and he thinks he might pass out from dehydration if he doesn't drink a gallon of water before another fit.

Izuku's puzzle is coming together seamlessly, every piece carefully chosen and added to the picture with intense deliberation. His concentration shows in the way his eyebrows furrow and how he doesn't spare the TV a single glance.

His voice is only a little louder than a whisper. "Why do you like All Might so much?"

Izuku jumps and flings a few puzzle pieces halfway across the room. He turns to face Shouta and he says, "You're awake! Are you feeling okay? You came in and weren't looking good and then Mama was talking to you but you weren't saying anything and she couldn't get

you off the couch to go to the doctor so she said we'd see how you were after she got back from work and she said I could stay home today with you!"

Even Izuku's bright grin can't completely hide his concern, obvious through the way his words run together and how his eyes are wide and worried.

"I'm okay."

For maybe the first time since he was thrown into the whirlwind that is Izuku Midoriya's childhood, there's an awkward silence between them. Izuku seems torn between looking at Shouta or looking away from him.

Shouta, meanwhile, is tired.

"Why do you like All Might so much?" he repeats quietly. "I don't get it. Isn't he kind of fake?"

Izuku blinks. He shifts so he can look at Shouta directly without having to twist his head at all. "All Might? Um."

Rather than burst into a long, rambling speech about All Might's virtues like he normally does, Izuku cocks his head to the side, clearly taking the question seriously. The silence between them is thoughtful and patient, showing that Izuku understands that Shouta needs more than his usual hero worship.

A moment before Shouta's about to tell him not to worry about it - before Shouta's going to shove everything that happened earlier into the dark catacombs of his memory to never be revisited - Izuku taps his hand against his knees and shrugs. He says, "There's a lot of heroes, and I like almost all of them, but All Might's different. He works so hard, all the time. Even though he doesn't have to, even though he could do what everyone else does and work for fame, he wants to help people - and he does! If he seems fake or fakes anything, it's just because he wants to help people and make them feel better, 'cause he smiles even when things are bad. And even with that, he is who he is and he does what he says he will and he means what he says. I don't really know how else to explain it."

"You're saying that he's straightforward."

Izuku beams. "Yes!"

It seems like a lame reason to adore someone so fervently. It also doesn't provide the insight that Shouta was hoping to receive, but it was unreasonable for him to think an almost-nine-year-old could untangle the knot his thoughts have twisted themselves into.

Knowing how Izuku has grown up, his response makes sense. It even somewhat explains why he likes Katsuki so much. Maybe Katsuki was cruel, but his actions and emotions and words lined up with each other. He's still prickly and standoffish now, but that consistency and bluntness remains.

Shouta knows that he's right. Hell, that straightforwardness is part of the reason why he relied on Yagi - why he trusted him, arguably more than anyone else - to keep his students safe. Yagi kept many secrets, but he rarely outright lied and he was always willing to do whatever it took to bring any of their students home safely.

Yagi only said things he meant - even this current version of him, full of faux-enthusiasm and cheesy grins and so much spotlight-glam, meant every stupid compliment he was paying Shouta. It was reassuring when the world was caving in around them. It made Shouta feel *safe* with him, knowing he didn't have to look for alternative motives or a hidden agenda.

It doesn't make the hurt go away. It doesn't make him feel any less inadequate for the task ahead of him, when he doesn't have any leads on All for One or Shigaraki, when it feels like he's wasting his time and if Toshinori Yagi had relied on anyone except himself, if he had just *talked* to someone, if he had told Shouta anything at all -

He cuts himself off.

It's not useful to linger on his resentment towards All Might. He needs to try to think logically and figure out how to jumpstart his investigation once more.

With the blank numbness that always blankets his thoughts in the wake of a meltdown, he can admit that he'll have to play ball with All Might and Tsukauchi. At least a little bit. They have resources and connections that he doesn't have, and maybe the rivalry between All Might and All for One will give All Might some secret insight into the villain's plans that Shouta can't see.

At the end of the day, though - Shouta doesn't trust this immature, bland version of Yagi.

He's tried to avoid admitting it (because then he'll have to stop his search for therapists that will accept a quirkless client and start looking for one that won't immediately shove antipsychotics down his throat the minute he starts talking about time travel, and he doesn't have time for that) but he has more than a few scars from his past-future-Yagi, and all of them revolve around the emotional equivalent of curdled milk that's currently sitting heavily in his stomach.

Betrayal. Resentment. Grief. A combination that makes his guts churn and has him shying away from harsh truths that he used to be able to face head-on.

It hurts knowing that Yagi didn't trust him enough to tell him everything he needed to know. That he didn't trust Shouta enough to tell him about Deku's past history of supposed quirklessness, that he never even told him how they met - He and Yagi had their disagreements and Shouta knows that he was hard on the guy, but he trusted Yagi *so much* .

He thought they were friends.

Hell, he thought they were almost family towards the end. Yagi had been there for Shouta up until he finally dropped dead, but now Shouta knows that Yagi never gave him a chance to do the same.

The tiny, hidden bit of Shouta that has always respected and admired larger-than-life heroes thought that he had finally earned a *real* hero's approval and support. The stoic child with the scary quirk would have reached Izuku-levels of excitement if he had thought his adult-self would one day receive the number one's approval and be viewed as an equal.

(Shouta doesn't linger much on his childhood trauma, too busy helping his students work through theirs and accumulating his own new and more brutal trauma every year, but even he knows that there's part of him that has always nursed a deep wound surrounding his feelings of inadequacy. Growing up with a quirk that was interesting but *scary* was plenty enough to give him a complex.)

So yeah.

Maybe he was never dazzled or even particularly impressed by the oaf, and All Might is a golden retriever of a man, stupid and loyal and blonde and fucking annoying in the worst ways, but Shouta thought they were friends and he thought that All Might was safe to trust. He thought that he had proved himself, and now that he's trying to stop

the world from going to shit, he's realizing that Toshinori had never, ever trusted him in return.

What else could Shouta have misread and been wrong about? What about All Might is genuine?

Added to the fact that All Might's current bullshit is actively screwing Shouta over and stomping around on his investigations, it's left him a bit of a mess. The hurt is more from that (unfair, immature, ridiculous because this isn't his Yagi, this isn't his friend, he's holding him accountable for sins that don't exist yet) feeling of betrayal rather than any of Toshinori's actual actions as of yet.

He knows all of this - knows that he needs to at least give All Might a chance to help, knows that All Might's distrust and inability to communicate with his peers has crippled Shouta's attempts at fixing the past and Shouta should be better than that, knows that everything he dislikes about All Might are traits that Shouta is equally guilty of exhibiting and he should suck up his frustration and get All Might's help -

But he doesn't think he can.

His hesitancy and hurt make him feel horribly, painfully alone.

Izuku's presence, though, eases the ache enough that he doesn't feel the need to spend all day on the couch feeling bad for himself. He's grateful that Inko let Izuku stay home and be there for him, even though he knows she's going to kick his ass for forcing her hand. The ass-kicking will be worth it, though, because being alone at this moment would be -

He scratches his nails along his scalp and reminds himself that he isn't alone now.

Izuku is here, which is enough on its own. Inko will be home eventually, Hizashi and Nemuri wouldn't leave him even if he threatened them, and even Tsukauchi would help if he gave him the chance to.

He's not alone. He can't ask for their help with All for One just yet (and maybe ever, if he can swing it), but they're here.

Shouta wipes at his eyes, trying futilely to scrub the dryness out of them, and says, "Thanks, kiddo. Since we're playing hooky today, what do you want to do?"

“Oh, um.” Izuku glances down at his puzzle, then back at Shouta and smiles widely. “We can just watch TV since you’re not feeling good. I’m okay here!”

“You’re a good kid,” he says. “Not a good liar.”

“No, really - !”

“I’m fine. Not sick at all. Just had a rough patrol.” Shouta grabs Izuku’s hand and presses it to his forehead. “See? No fever. I’m alright.”

Izuku glances at Shouta’s forehead, then his eyes, then his forehead again. “Are you sure?” he presses.

“Positive. Now tell me what you really want to do.”

To the shock of absolutely no one, Izuku would like to train.

Shouta moves them to the front yard of the apartment complex, where there’s just enough grass and soft ground for them to roll around in. Izuku trails after him with a bright grin, nearly skipping as he talks about the newest hero’s fighting style - they use a bow and arrow, but at a far longer range than should be possible, and R-Cherry has yet to publicly acknowledge their quirk, but Izuku thinks that it might be some sort of tracking one since they haven’t missed a shot since their debut.

Shouta says, “What are they, a fruit salad? What kind of name is that? Get into position. If your hero name ends up fruit-related, I’m disowning you.”

“I already have a hero name!” Izuku protests. “And it doesn’t have fruit in it!”

“Right, my mistake, Eraserbit. Now get into position so I can kick your ass into shape.”

Training Izuku is less training and more “let’s teach this small kid how to dodge and get him better flexibility since Deku’s was shit until Uraraka convinced him to take up yoga.” It’s a lot of Shouta throwing gentle punches and kicks at Izuku with increasing strength and erratic movements as he gets better at it. He intersperses it with mild gymnastics - cartwheels, some somersaults, crap like that - and Izuku is occupied for hours at a time.

He's noticeably improved since they started, and Shouta allows himself to feel proud of his little nuisance. Izuku is fast and sneaky, he's bendy enough that he can dart underneath Shouta's legs with ease, and he's started to deflect some of Shouta's blows when his speed isn't enough to escape.

Izuku's a kid, but he already carries the determination that made Deku the powerhouse he was. If Shouta wasn't emotionally exhausted and feeling like one glimpse of All Might's disgustingly cheery grin might make him crumble to the ground screaming, he'd be surprised by the way Izuku takes hits and keeps going.

Shouta's not anywhere close to his full strength, but it's still impressive to see an eight-year-old catch Shouta's fist in his palm and not flinch.

"Nice," he says approvingly.

Izuku pants and smiles as much as he can when he's wheezing for breath. Shouta doesn't think he's sweating enough, so he kicks out and catches Izuku's shin, hoping to hook him and bring him tumbling down. Izuku takes it, though, and remains standing. Shouta gives him an impressed grin.

Izuku has a moment to beam proudly before they are interrupted by an annoyingly familiar (familiarly annoying?) screech of, "JESUS, SHOU, WHAT THE HELL - "

"Mr. 'Zashi!" Izuku cheers, letting go of Shouta's fist and sprinting towards their intruder, nearly sending Shouta toppling over. "Hi Mr. 'Zashi!"

Hizashi lets Izuku wrap his arms around his waist but continues stalking forward, ranting loudly and waving a finger at Shouta. "WHY WERE YOU BEATING UP 'ZUKU HE'S A BABY - "

"Excuse you, he's eight."

Hizashi's eye twitches hard enough that his glasses tremble. "YOU CAN'T HIT AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD LIKE THAT!"

"We're training."

"Yeah, Mr. 'Zashi!" Izuku backs him up, smiling brightly. "I've gotta train if I want to be a hero!"

Hizashi looks down at Izuku, back at Shouta, then back down to Izuku. He crouches and holds Izuku at arms-length, inspecting every inch of visible skin. He even reaches down to push his socks down and look at Izuku's shin, tension slowly leaving his shoulders.

"I'm not an idiot," Shouta says blandly. "I wasn't using enough strength to hurt him. I work with him almost every day at this point and know what he can handle."

"Mr. 'Zawa said that he'd stop training me if I didn't tell him if I was hurt 'cause trust is a two-way street and it'd break his trust in me if he found out I was lying and it'd also make him feel bad to find out later that I was hurt and he didn't know," Izuku recites dutifully. "But look! I'm not hurt!" He holds out his hands, showing his palms and his knuckles, then pulls up his shirt to show his uninjured belly. He points at a spot higher up on his chest and says, "That isn't from training, that's from school, so that doesn't count."

"It does count."

"It does count," Izuku amends. "But Mr. 'Zawa will still train me as long as the stuff from school isn't too bad."

"If it's bad at all," Shouta says pointedly.

A dramatic sigh, then a repeated, "If it's bad at all," is added.

Hizashi stands back up and stretches his arms above his head, poorly mimicking Izuku's sigh while doing so. "Such a burden, to not get hurt. You suffer a lot, green bean."

"Says the one who overreacted just because we were sparring."

"It looked like you were hitting him really hard!" he exclaims. "Hell, that kick looks like it would've hurt me! I can't believe lil' 'Zuku was able to stay standing."

"Again: I'm not an idiot. I know what he can handle. Kid's sturdy as hell."

Izuku's chest damn near puffs out at the praise, even though his injury resistance is more due to genetics than any action on his part. Shouta reaches over and ruffles his hair anyway.

Hizashi holds his hands up, says, "Okay, okay. Sorry, I overreacted. Won't happen again."

“What’re you doing here anyway?”

Izuku tilts his head back so he’s looking at Shouta - almost upside down with how much he had to tilt to meet his eyes - and says, “Mr. ‘Zashi always comes over on Fridays.”

Does he? Shouta knows that Hizashi has been around a lot more than he used to, but he didn’t know that there was a set schedule for his visits.

“Ah. Well, we can head in and start cooking.”

“Mr. ‘Zawa, Mom said she’d pick up food since you weren’t feeling well - “

“You weren’t feeling well?”

“Rough patrol. It’s fine.”

“He wasn’t talking,” Izuku, the backstabber, says quickly. “He just came home and laid on the couch and he didn’t respond until forever later and it was weird so I wonder if it was someone’s quirk that hit him during patrol and Mom wanted to get him to see a doctor but he wouldn’t get up and he’s heavy so - “

“Okay, that’s enough tattling.” Shouta picks Izuku up and throws him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, ignoring the delighted shriek. “I’m fine now. Hizashi, help me keep this elementary school delinquent occupied until food.”

Shouta doesn’t look back at Hizashi as he walks back to the building, but he can hear the forced calm as he says, “Because there are tiny ears, I will allow the subject change, but we will be circling back to you pulling the catatonic-zombie routine, got it?”

At least Hizashi will wait to ream him out until Inko gets home - it’ll be a louder scolding with two of them, but it’ll get all of the complaints out of the way in one go. He prefers it that way, even if the two mother hens’ alliance is terrifying on their worst days.

Shouta gives him a lackadaisical thumbs-up, accepting his inevitable fate.

Hizashi rushes forward to link their arms together and scrub a hand over Izuku’s hair, starting a series of giggles that Shouta could feel through the shoulder that’s against the kid’s stomach. “So, do you

guys wanna hear about how Endeavor's been bugging the crap out of me?"

"Seriously? What for?"

"Hell if I know. He's got a hate-boner for All Might a mile wide and the patrols in this neighborhood are setting off his inferiority complex. He's trying to bogart all of the shifts in town even though his style isn't really ideal for this area so All Might can't take them and get the publicity that Endeavor is convinced he's gearing for."

"I mean. Aldera's not ideal for All Might's fighting either, honestly."

"It sure ain't," Hizashi agrees brightly. "But you know how Endeavor is. I'm convinced he's so tall and wide because his body couldn't handle all of his anger otherwise."

Izuku's giggles become guffaws, and even Shouta can't stop himself from a small grin.

Maybe Toshinori never fully trusted him. Maybe All Might never will. Maybe this entire mission to save the world is more than Shouta can handle.

But this - Izuku's laugh, Hizashi's arm in his - is worth all of the struggle. It's worth *trying* .

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